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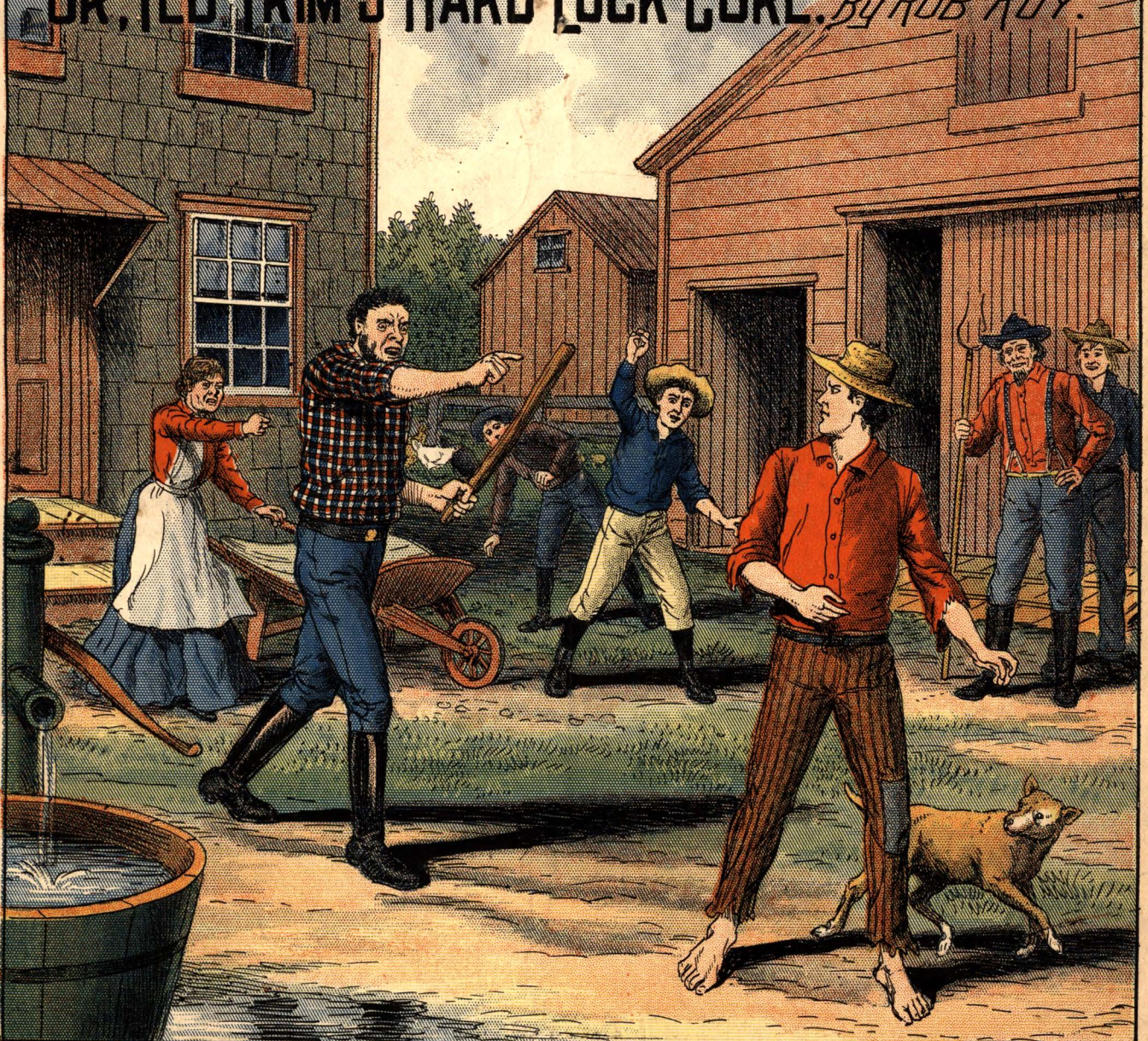
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WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE STORY **WEEKLY**. EVERY WEEK.

KICKED OFF THE EARTH; OR, TED TRIM'S HARD LUCK CURE. *By ROB ROY.*

HARRY M. LANE.



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No. 7

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OR,

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By ROB ROY.

HARRY M. LANE.

CHAPTER I.

GIT!

"And be back in two minutes, if ye want any breakfast!" screamed Marm Griggs.

Ted Trim, lamp in hand, hurried toward the barn.

"Didn't ye hear me?" screamed the woman.

"Yes'm."

"Then, why didn't ye answer, ye good-for-nothin'?"

"I was in a hurry, ma'am."

Whizz! Fluke Griggs, peering around the corner of the barn, let fly a green apple.

Plump! It struck Ted on his right cheek, just in front of the ear.

But Ted was altogether too used to abuse to pay any heed to small hostility like this.

Carrying the lamp carefully, he hastened on toward the chicken-coop.

Into the chicken-coop he darted, getting down upon his knees.

Holding the lamp carefully, he explored in the crevice back of the row of hen's nests.

It was dark in there, hence the lamp.

But Marm Griggs, who had been out a little while before, looking for eggs, believed that she had lost her back comb down in this dark crevice.

Hence Ted's job.

It was not an easy task to explore the whole of that deep, narrow, dark crevice.

It was such a difficult, disagreeable, patience-trying task, in fact, that it had naturally fallen to Ted's lot to do it.

That was what the Griggs kept him for. He was not the boy-of-all-work, but the boy-of-all-mean-work!

Ted didn't know who his parents were.

He had never had any, that he could remember or had heard of; but, like Topsy, he had "growed up."

Up to his twelfth year he had lived in the children's section of the county almshouse.

At twelve the Griggses had taken him.

Ever since then Ted had sighed heartily for a return to the almshouse.

Time and again he would have run away, but he knew the chances were big that the county officers would catch him.

The Griggses had taken pains, time and again, to impress upon him what sort of punishment would be meted out to him if he ever disgraced them by running away.

So Ted had grown up to the age of seventeen, a ragged, almost shapeless boy, hard to describe.

He never resented anything that was done to him, and seemed utterly lacking in spirit.

All of the Griggses took huge delight in tormenting him.

Uriah Griggs abused the boy on general principles, believing that thereby he got more work out of the youngster.

Marm Griggs claimed to have "nerves." She heaped blame and misery on Ted because he "exasperated" her

and made her nerves worse; though, if this were true, it must have been Ted's meekness that worried her.

Fluke Griggs, aged fourteen, took delight in tormenting meek Ted for the simple reason that Fluke—his right name was Luke—was naturally low-down and a bully.

Dag Griggs, aged thirteen, took pains to torment our hero because Fluke did it.

This summer there were two grown-up farm-hands on the place, Bud Long and George White.

Mean enough men they were, for the very reason that no decent, self-respecting laborer would work for 'Riah Griggs.

Even these farm-hands took delight in making messes for Ted. They would have plagued the boy more had it not been that 'Riah Griggs kept them too hard at work most of the time.

Three hours of early morning work having been done on the farm, it was time for breakfast now.

"But I've got to find that blasted comb," growled Ted, as he groped in the darkest corners of the crevice. "If I don't, it's no breakfast for me. Great Scott, but I'm hungry!"

"Ted!" rang 'Riah Griggs's voice, raspingly.

"Yes, sir."

"Come here, ye loafer."

"I'm doing something here for Mis' Griggs."

"Come here, I said!"

"And let Mis' Griggs's job go?" called Ted.

He knew well enough that, if he let Marm Griggs's task slide, no matter if under orders, he would lose his breakfast as sure as two and two are four.

"You, Ted!"

"Yes, sir."

"You come a-running, or I'll pull every hair out of the top of your head!"

'Riah Griggs was a man who seldom wasted words, and who generally meant all he said.

"I'm coming, sir!" and Ted leaped to his feet, leaving the lamp on the floor of the chicken-coop.

"Here, you lazy, good-for-nothing!" roared the farmer, who was holding one end of a heavy packing-case, the other end of which rested on a farm truck. "Help me to take this into the barn."

Ted sprang to obey.

Off came the heavy box. Though Ted Trim struggled hard to hold up his end, the load was far heavier than should have been put upon a boy of seventeen, especially a half-fed one.

"You're leaving your end sag," grunted the farmer, himself panting under the work.

"It's heavy," quivered Ted, who felt as if his back were breaking.

"Heavy?" snorted 'Riah Griggs. "I wonder if you're ever going to get any sand about work!"

Ted said no more, but took an extra brace, trying his level best not to stagger.

They got the case into the barn, at last.

Down it went with a thud on the floor.

"Huh!" snorted Griggs. "B'lieve you let that drop hard on purpose."

"No, I didn't, sir," Ted protested.

"Huh! Ye don't deserve no breakfast!" grunted Griggs. "Don't see what we're feedin' ye for anyway. All ye eat don't make no strength. It jest goes to skin and bones."

Ted didn't reply. He knew well enough that any argument would make certain his failure to get breakfast, and he was desperately hungry.

"Oh, Pop!" called Fluke, suddenly, from outside the barn.

"What's up, Luke?"

"Jest look at the chicken-coop!"

"What's up with it?" demanded 'Riah Griggs, hastening outside, for there was excitement in his son's voice.

"Well, it's afire," explained Fluke, who, with mouth wide agape, was standing past the end of the barn.

"Whee! See it blaze!" cried Dag, excitedly, as he came running out from the kitchen.

"Land sakes! But that's some of that wuthless Ted's work!" cried Mrs. Griggs, rushing from the house.

The chicken-coop was, indeed, briskly ablaze—that is, the hen-house part.

Frightened poultry had scrambled out into the runway, where they were now huddling in corners.

One wall of the hen-house was fast in the embrace of the flames.

Little tongues of fire were spurting up through the roof.

"Come on an' help—everybody!" shouted 'Riah Griggs, as he rushed toward the hen-house. "Long! White!"

Out from the tool-shed came the two hired men, running with lumbering steps.

"And there's that last settin' of chicks in there!" cried Mrs. Griggs. "Ted, you git in and get them chicks out!"

The coop was blazing fast, now, all around the doorway.

But Ted, given the hardest job, as always, and not daring to rebel, tried his best to reach the door.

A burst of flame, scorching his face, drove him back.

"Ain't ye goin' in there?" demanded Marm Griggs, shrilly.

"Yes'm."

"Then hurry, or them chicks will be roasted alive!"

Again Ted made the effort, but the heat forced him back with hot, blistered hands.

'Riah Griggs, in the meantime, had led his men to the further side of the coop.

These men were trying to tear down a part of the doomed coop.

Just as Ted was about to make the third effort to get into the coop a loud clucking in the runway showed that the mother hen had gained that point of safety and was noisily leading all her chicks.

"There, the chicks are safe, ma'am," panted Ted.

"No thanks to you, ye lazy, timid scarecrow!" snapped the woman.

Rip! rip! rip! Griggs and his men were tearing some of

the boards off the coop, and Ted ran around nimbly to help.

Fluke and Dag stood close by, shouting advice, but neither of them knowing what to do.

"Might as well give it up," sighed the farmer, as the top of the coop fell in and a shower of sparks rose. "We've saved the poultry, anyway. Come to breakfast now. When the place is cool we'll tackle the clean-up job."

Shaking his head, 'Riah Griggs led the way back to the barnyard.

"Of all the shiftless, costly, no-use boys, I never see the like," wailed Marm Griggs.

"Did Ted set that fire?" demanded her husband, swiftly.

Struck with a sudden thought, Trim stopped short, his face suddenly and deathly pale.

He trembled in every limb as if with ague.

"He must have!" accused Marm Griggs.

"Did yo, ye little loafer?" blazed the farmer, hoarsely, as he turned, ragingly, on the boy.

"Why, sir, I—I——"

"Did ye set that fire?" insisted 'Riah.

"Why, sir, wh-when you called' sir, I was in there with a lamp——"

"In there with a lamp in broad daylight, ye plumb idiot?" roared Griggs.

"Why, Mis' Griggs——"

"Shut yer mouth. I didn't," screamed the woman, seeing that she might be in for a share of the blame.

So Ted remained silent, trembling and gasping, looking the picture of miserable, sure-enough guilt.

"Oh, ye put a lighted lamp in there, and some fowl knocked it over!" cried the farmer, making a good guess at the cause of the accident.

He turned, grabbing up a cart-stake that lay on the ground.

"Ye're tryin' to burn us out, are ye—ye almshouse thief!" blazed the man, coming forward.

Marm Griggs was pointing an accusing finger at him.

Fluke and Dag reached down swiftly for stones to throw.

Without a particle of sympathy the farm-hands stood grinningly by.

Just one friend came forward at this miserable moment—a solemn-looking little yellow cur, Gyp, by name, that Ted had always been good to.

"This is what comes of harborin' almshouse thieves!" snorted the farmer, as he took two swift steps toward Ted.

"Soak him good!" cried Fluke, letting fly a stone that grazed our hero's ear.

Then the whole outfit jumped on homeless, friendless, hungry Ted.

"You lazy, doddering, whining, sneaking hulk, you're kicked out! We won't have you here any longer. Scoot! Git off the earth!" roared 'Riah Griggs, raising the club.

To the farmer's amazement, Trim did not whine or cringe.

Instead, he straightened up, and his eyes flashed with a sudden spirit too great for words!

"Good!" he cried, straightening up. "Go? You bet I'll go. I would sooner be dead than stay with this pirate crew of yours a minute longer, 'Riah Griggs!"

"What's that?" gasped the farmer, aiming a blow at Ted's head. "I'll whale you good for that!"

"Gr-r-r! Yap!"

"Ouch!" cursed the farmer, breaking in swear-words and dropping his stake to rub one of his legs.

For Gyp had made a sudden bound forward, sinking his teeth into Griggs's leg.

"Good-by!" sang out Ted, derisively. "Come, Gyp!"

He strode off down the road ere the astounded ones left behind could recover their wind or speech.

"Here! Bring that dog back!" Fluke screamed, shrilly.

"Is this your dog?" Ted called back over his shoulder.

"You bet he is!" Fluke asserted, wildly.

"Then call your dog back!"

"Here, Gyp, Gyp, Gyp!"

"Wow! wow! yap!" spoke Gyp, frisking ahead and then turning to look at the kicked-out boy as if urging him to a frolic.

"You, Ted! Come back here an' get your whaling!" called Griggs, stormily.

"Go to blazes, the whole crew!" sang back Ted, turning, for an instant to look around. "I'm through with you all! 'Riah Griggs, you're nothing but a slave-driver, and the poisonest mean one that ever lived!"

"I'll show ye, Ted Trim!"

Bulkily, hulkily down the road came the farmer, hot-foot, Fluke and Dag trailing at his heels.

"I'll race you for it, you old criminal!" taunted back Ted. "Come on, Gyp!"

And Ted set off, showing amazing speed as a sprinter.

"You stop!" commanded 'Riah Griggs, himself halting, out of wind, and shaking his club at the boy.

"Yes; when you catch me," Ted jeered back.

Ted sped on, the yellow dog barking joyously before him until a rise in the road, once crossed, shut out the Griggs homestead from view.

"Kicked out, am I?" panted Ted, halting under a tree to fan himself with his shapeless hat. "Glad of it! And they'll never get me back. I'll die sooner than go back to that mean crew!"

But now what?

Ted felt a momentary sinking at the heart as he realized that the whole problem of life lay before him, waiting to be solved!

CHAPTER II.

"KNOCKED!"

"What'll we do, Gyp, old fellow?"

Ted, in his anxiety to get beyond pursuit, had tramped five miles and more without a stop.

He meant to go on again soon, but just now he felt tired and really faint.

He was off up on a back road, that looked down on the farms in the valley.

Away over there in the distance he could just make out the Griggs place.

Once over this ridge of hills, and Trim felt that he would be in a wholly different world.

"Oh, Gyp, I wish we had a bit to eat—something! Not particular what," sighed Ted.

The dog, which had been frisking all the way, now looked anxiously into its young master's face, then whined.

"That's so, Gyp," nodded the boy. "You're dead right. Whining ain't going to feed us. Never mind, old fellow. I'll rest my feet a couple of minutes, and then I'll trudge on again."

Ted stretched himself out on the cool grass.

It would have been luxury, but for the gnawing in his stomach.

But Gyp, after seeing him thus disposed of, went scouting off.

Worn out as he was, Ted's eyes were almost closing in sleep when—

"Yap! yap! yap!" sounded the eager voice of the dog.

"Now, what's he up to, over there in the woods?" murmured Ted, sitting up.

"Yap! yap!" implored the yellow dog.

But Ted, not understanding, sat and stared.

Then out frisked Gyp, and straight up to his master, bearing in his mouth a small piece of bread.

"Yap! yap!" announced the dog, dropping the bread and turning as if he would frisk into the woods again.

"Why, old fellow, are you trying to tell me you've struck a feed?"

"Yap! yap!" Gyp asserted, leaping up and down, and then bolting for the woods.

Ted followed, eager with hope.

Yes, sure enough, there, where the dog was frisking about, were signs of something to eat.

Picknickers had been there, beyond a doubt, for paper boxes lay about.

Ted, feverishly exploring, pulled out of one box half a ham sandwich.

In another he found a fragment of cake.

A section of pie and a banana! More bread, and cold bologna sausage!

"Yap! yap!" demanded Gyp, excitedly.

"You're dead right, old fellow," nodded Ted. "It sure is great!"

He rounded up all the paper boxes, exploring the contents of each.

Altogether he gathered up a rich harvest of discarded food.

It was all a little bit soggy from the dew of the night before—but what does that matter when one has the appetite?

There was enough for both. Master and dog, for at least once in their lives, had enough to eat!

"Oh, how good that was!" sighed Ted, when, at last, the last morsel had disappeared. "Gyp, you're the best chum a fellow could have. I'll never forget you, Gyp, boy."

"Yap! yap!"

"You mean we're strong enough to tramp on now? You're right, Gyp."

Up over the hill ridge they went, and down on the other side.

As they went down the slope, Ted got glimpses of handsome country estates, summer homes for rich city people.

The roads were laid out with more care.

Lawns were beautifully laid out. There were handsome gardens and beautiful drives lined with tall, noble old trees.

The houses that showed here and there looked like palaces to Ted's untrained eyes.

Two men were working busily near one of the big gates that Trim passed. One was giving orders to the other.

"Got a job to spare here?" hailed Ted, timidly, as he halted.

"Who wants it?" queried the man in authority.

"I do, if you please," said Ted, meekly.

"Want to learn the lay of the place and find out what you can steal, eh?" demanded the head gardener.

"I—I am no thief!" Ted Trim stammered, turning flaming red.

"You look it, anyway," gruffly responded the man. "No; we don't want any hoboes here."

Trembling, and first red and then pale, Ted turned and slunk away.

Yes, slunk. For a dog is as mean as you make him feel, and it's often the same way with a human being.

But after going a quarter of a mile, Ted got his courage back, and a flash came into his eyes.

"I ain't going to be downed that way!" he cried, tremulously. "I'm just as good as anybody else. I won't be treated like a thief. I'll get a job—somehow—somewhere. And then I can get some clothes, and I won't look like a tramp any more."

A mile further on Ted halted again, trying hard to brace up his courage.

For here a fine-looking man of about forty, dressed in white flannels and smoking a cigar, stood leaning over his front gate.

"May I speak to you, sir?" asked Ted, respectfully.

"Why, yes," smiled the man, turning upon him. "Why not?"

"Well, sir, it's just this way," went on the boy, gathering courage from the other's half-friendly smile. "I want a job, and I need it badly. I may look like a tramp, but I'm not. If you have any work that you can give me to do——"

"Where did you work last?" asked the man, simply.

Ted colored, instantly. He had not foreseen this.

"Why, sir, I—I——"

"Well, it really doesn't matter," responded the man,

looking him over, shrewdly. "I keep two men already, and they don't have much to do. No; I don't need any one."

Ted trudged on again, but his heart felt away down, somewhere near where his boots ought to have been.

"Great Scott! Does a fellow have to starve because he's barefooted and ragged? Can't I get a job anywhere unless I steal clothes to make a start with?"

A great, big, anxious tear shone in either eye now.

Gyp saw, and, looking up, whined.

"Why, you're the wisest little old fellow I ever knew!" gulped Ted, trying to smile, as he looked down at his faithful friend. "You're trying to tell me again, Gyp, that whining doesn't cure anything. All right! I'll be hanged if I'll whine!"

A horse's hoofs, and the roll of wheels, sounded in the road behind him.

Ted turned to look, and then became spellbound.

The horse, a sleek, trim-looking animal, was hitched into a village cart that was as natty as the animal itself.

But these were mere details.

In the village cart, driving, sat a being whom Ted Trim could class only with the angels.

She was a girl of sixteen, slim, rounded, and prettier than any picture that the homeless boy could have imagined.

Her eyes were of the deepest blue, her hair but a shade darker than golden, and her teeth, as her lips parted, looked like pure, pearly jewels.

All in white she was clad, with white silken gloves. Resting on her head was the prettiest of big, white picture hats.

"That's no ordinary girl!" quivered awe-struck Ted. "She must be one of the princesses I've read about."

He stood still at the edge of the road, eyeing her so intently that he forgot all about good manners.

He stared so hard, in fact, that the girl, realizing the intensity of his gaze, looked alarmed.

Whish! Down came her whip, the horse breaking into a trot.

Something slid off the seat and fell into the dust of the road—a dainty-looking little affair of tan leather.

"Say! Hold on!" Ted shouted after her, as he leaped forward into the center of the road.

He had the leather object in his hand now—an angel's purse!

But the girl, even if she heard, only whipped up the harder.

"Well, let her go. There must be money in this, and you need it, if you're ever going to look decent enough to get a job!" something seemed to say to him.

But Ted, if he dreamed of that, was awake in a second more.

"Hold on, please, ma'am! You've dropped your wallet!" shouted Ted, at his lustiest.

The girl seemed about to turn, but she didn't.

Down the road after the village cart pelted Ted, Gyp barking ahead of him.

"Hold on—please! You've lost your wallet!" Ted bawled, again.

This time she turned and looked over her shoulder.

Ted flourished aloft the dainty purse.

Then, indeed, this wonderful girl reined up and waited.

But Ted kept on at a full burst of speed, not halting until he panted up to the side of the vehicle.

"Why, yes, it must be mine, thank you!" cried the girl, in a voice that to Ted was sweeter than any music he could imagine. "Thank you ever so much. And there's quite a bit of money in it, too," she added, as she leaned over to accept her purse from the boy. "Now, aren't you sorry," she added, with a roguish smile, "that you didn't keep it?"

"No, ma'am," returned Ted, promptly.

"Why? Wouldn't you like fifty dollars?"

She looked, rather shrewdly, at his tattered appearance.

"Yes, ma'am, I'd like it well enough," replied Ted. "But I'd want it to be mine."

"Well, you shall have some of it," replied the girl, in a friendly voice that went straight to his heart. Her tone and her smile were as if she were offering to divide something with a chum. "Here, your honesty is certainly worth ten dollars."

Slipping out one of the crisp bills, she held it toward our hero.

But Ted did not even reach out for it.

Instead, he drew himself up with a pride that seemed to the girl absurd.

"I'd like money well enough, ma'am, but it ain't mine until I've earned it."

"But you've earned this by your honesty."

"A fellow shouldn't earn money by honesty, ma'am. I mean, money that's earned by work."

"Well, you are odd enough!" cried the girl.

"Am I?" queried Ted, simply. "I didn't mean to be. I beg your pardon."

She laughed, merrily, though there was nothing in her laughter that embarrassed the boy.

Her eyes told her how sadly he must need a little money.

"You'll take this to please me, won't you?" she urged.

"No, ma'am—thank you."

"Well, you surely are odd, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Ted Trim, ma'am."

"Ted, what are you doing in this part of the country?" asked the girl, with pretty bluntness.

"Trying to find some kind of work to do."

"Why, you look big enough, and strong enough. Surely you won't have any trouble."

"Just one trouble, ma'am," Ted confessed, growing very red and looking down.

"Do you—do you mean—anything about your clothes?" asked the girl, herself a little embarrassed now.

"Yes, ma'am," Ted replied, gathering the courage to raise his eyes and look frankly into her blue orbs.

"You're an honest one, if you are a queer one!" she cried, impulsively. "Ted Trim, I'll tell you what to do. You get in and ride home with me."

"Ride with you?" he gasped, staring at her with thunder-struck eyes.

"Why, yes, if you don't mind."

"Can't I run behind the carriage?" he suggested.

"Nonsense, Ted!" smiled the girl. "Get in, or we shall quarrel."

She moved aside to make room on the seat. Her eyes looked Ted over in such a commanding way that he dared not play the rebel.

So he climbed up into the cart, Gyp watching him with wondering eyes.

"This seems like imposition, ma'am," he began.

"You must stop calling me 'ma'am,'" she commanded.

"Then what shall I say, ma'am?"

"My name is Nellie Gray. Call me Miss Nellie, or Miss Gray."

"Very well, Miss—Nellie."

"That's better," she nodded, as she gathered in the reins and started the horse slowly along. "Now, tell me something about yourself, won't you, Ted? You've been to school?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am—Miss Nellie."

"And you read and write?"

"Yes, Miss Nellie."

"Fond of reading?"

"When I can get a book. That ain't often."

"We have lots at the house. I'll lend you some. You're to have a place with us, you know. Papa is a very kind man, and, when I tell him how nice you've been, he'll find some sort of a place for you."

He had been "nice" to her? Ted wondered if the world were standing on its head!

And he was to have a place at her home—to be near her!

Surely, something wonderful had happened since morning.

She chatted on, doing almost all of the talking, until they reached the gateway of the most splendid big country house that Ted Trim had seen along this road.

Straight up to the front door she drove, a groom coming forward from a stable at the rear.

"I see papa in the library now," the girl confided to her new acquaintance. "Ah, there he is, looking out at us now."

Mr. Gray certainly was looking out. He seemed utterly dumfounded at the sight of his daughter's tattered companion.

Miss Nellie stopped just before the great door. Ted sprang nimbly out, and turned to assist Miss Nellie.

But the groom pushed him quietly aside, himself helping the girl down.

"I shan't want the horse again, Parker," said the girl, and the rig was led away.

"Now, you wait right here on the porch until I've talked to papa," directed Miss Gray. "Don't be impatient, please. I won't be long."

Ted stood on the porch, as if in a trance. Gyp crouched at his feet.

But soon Ted's ears, unusually sharp, caught the low, remonstrating tones of a man's voice:

"Nellie, my dear, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I simply can't have that young ragamuffin about."

"He's no ragamuffin, papa. He's a good and honest boy, and a very polite one."

"Nellie, pet, he's a tramp. He has a mean, sneaking look. Why, how do you know that he isn't trying on purpose to get in here? He may be a spy for thieves who've heard about the bonds in that safe. Nellie, my dear, I can't and won't have such a suspicious-looking character about the place!"

Mr. Gray spoke the truth, even more than he knew.

For Ted, at that moment, hot and cold, red-faced and then quiveringly pale, was stealing down the driveway as fast as he could go, dejected Gyp following with his tail between his legs.

"Ragamuffin, tramp, thief, am I?" half-sobbed humiliated Ted. "No, he won't have me around. I'll vanish. But there's the door closed on a fellow who dared hope, for just a minute, that he might have a chance to get into heaven!"

By the time that Miss Nellie, sad-eyed, returned to the porch, not even the cloud of dust remained down the road that had been raised by Ted Trim's flying feet.

CHAPTER III.

WHACKED.

"It ain't much use, is it, Gyp?"

Ted gulped hard, and the dog rubbed its cold, moist nose in one of his hands.

It was nearly dark.

Ted, at the pinch, had found himself too tired and sore to get more than half a mile below the Gray mansion.

But this seemed far enough for the night was now near.

There were cool and inviting woods not far from the road.

Into these woods Trim had stolen, and now he sat on the cool grass, resting his back against the trunk of a tree.

"I thought I had a chance—it seemed like I had—but I didn't," Ted confided, in a jumble, to his chum. "Well, no matter. That jolt saved my being hungry to-night, for it took away my appetite. It can't take the ache out of the bones, though. I've got to have a good sleep, Gyp, if I'm to go far to-morrow."

Ted looked around him.

In this fine summer weather it was not a bit of a hardship to sleep out of doors.

Yet our hero had had that very kind of lodgings often enough to know that, when one sleeps out of doors, it is well to have some shelter from the dew.

So he looked about until he saw a thick clump of bushes.

"I can bend the tops together enough to make a pretty fair shelter," he murmured, limping toward them.

Twenty minutes later, as the sun was going down, Ted

crawled into the clump and stretched himself out on his back.

Gyp ranged alongside of his master.

"God bless Miss Nellie!"

That was all the prayer he said before his eyes closed.

Then his soul, hungrier than his body, drifted off into slumberland.

Once in a while he turned slightly, but he did not wake up as the hours passed.

Far into the night it was when he awoke with something of a start.

He lay and listened for a few moments, wondering what it was that had startled him.

Gr-r-r-r! Gyp's bark sounded low but warning.

"Hush, Gyp, old fellow!" whispered Ted, reaching out in the dark and resting a hand over the dog's cold muzzle.

Thus ordered, Gyp sniffed once, then kept wholly quiet.

Footsteps were coming their way.

"If it's the folks who own this woods they might order me out if they knew I was here," quivered Ted, who still felt too footsore to care about leaving this bed on the ground.

The steps came nearer, until three men halted within a dozen feet of Ted's head.

Gyp wanted to bark defiance, but Ted restrained the faithful animal.

"It's safe enough, now, for everybody must be asleep over there," Ted heard one of the trio murmur.

"Sure there are no dogs?"

"There was one, but I poisoned that just after dark."

"Wonder if the folks found the dead pup?"

"Guess not, for I lugged the carcass off into the woods."

"Well, it's easy enough getting into the house. We'll have the window open in a jiffy, and then be in the house. Then, if you can work the safe combination——"

"Oh, I can do that all right!"

Ted Trim listened in tense horror.

Little as he knew of the world, he realized that these men were planning a robbery.

He had often pictured desperate robbers to himself.

Now the desire was strong to see if these men looked like the criminals he had imagined.

It required only a little shifting of his head. Then Ted was able to peer out.

He had "bat's eyes" that could see fairly well in the dark.

To aid him, there was some starlight, and two of the men were puffing at cigars whose ends glowed.

They didn't look anything like the criminals Ted's imagination had pictured to him.

These were all young men, not bad-looking, and dressed more like business men.

No weapons were in sight, nor any sign of burglars' tools.

Had he not heard their talk, Ted would never have thought of suspecting these three men of being criminals.

"Now, you're to watch the front of the house," spoke the one of the trio who appeared to be in authority. "And

you're to watch just under the window. Remember, if any one meddles, you're to shoot. Plug straight, too. Don't let anybody hold you up!"

Ted shivered with terror. This all had an ugly sound.

"Whew-ew!" he chattered, inwardly. "If they catch me here, they won't do a thing to me!"

Appealingly, he reached down to hold Gyp's jaws closed tight.

The dog, curious and alarmed, was trembling.

It would take hardly a motion from these plotters to make the dog growl.

And then——

Ted strove by his touch to make the dog understand that no alarm was to be given. He hoped Gyp understood.

"Is old Gray a light sleeper?" asked one of the men.

"Likely to be. He doesn't always sleep well."

"He will sleep all right, if he meddles with us!"

"Gray!" Again Ted shook with terror.

But this time the fright was not for himself.

"Miss Nellie's father! Miss Nellie in danger!"

Trim's head was whirling now with the excitement of the thing.

How he wished these men would go away—at a little distance, at any rate! He wanted to take a long breath.

"Come along," directed the leader of the burglars. "An hour's sharp work, and it'll all be over. Unless——"

That "unless" made Ted shiver harder than ever.

For some moments the boy lay there, shaking harder than ever.

Napoleon once declared the rarest kind of courage is the "two o'clock in the morning courage." The great general meant that, when a man is aroused to the sudden need of action in the face of danger at a late hour in the night he is likely to find that courage oozing.

And Ted had never before needed courage—had never been in a position that called for the kind of grit that faces death with a smile.

"Oh, I've got to get there first!" he groaned, sitting bolt upright as the steps of the prowlers sounded more faintly in the distance. "Gyp, old fellow, you mustn't make a sound. Do you understand?"

But Gyp, having a different notion of his duties, started to frisk ahead.

"Here, come back here!" whispered Ted, appealingly.

He stopped short until the dog came back.

"It's too bad, but I've got to carry you," muttered the boy.

Bending, he picked up his four-footed chum.

Gyp was not exactly an easy load. Yet there was one advantage to carrying him, for the dog now seemed to understand that caution and silence were called for.

So Ted trod along until he reached the road.

He had hoped to hurry on and reach the Gray mansion ahead of the burglars.

But there were the three figures, ahead of him down the road.

"If I go into the woods, I may lose the way," he re-

flected, desperately. "And I can't pass 'em on the road. No; I've got to keep behind. But I'll find some way to stop this. I must—Miss Nellie was so good to me."

Now, they were out in the open again, the prowlers and the boy who was so stealthily dogging them.

There was a wall only for protection.

Ted, by keeping sufficiently to the rear of the trio, and ready to duck at an instant's notice, was able to trail without great risk of being caught at it.

Now, he came to a stop close to the wall.

The burglars had turned in close to the driveway, approaching the house by darting from clump to clump of shrubbery.

Ted, still carrying Gyp, gained the first clump of bushes.

But he knew better than to follow closely now, for the burglars, more keenly alert, now that they were close to the house, were looking about on all sides.

"How on earth can I give the alarm?" Ted wondered.

"I can't get up close to the house, or they'll see me and finish me. Thy'd do it, too—the desperate scoundrels."

But he gained the next clump of bushes, and then the one after that.

He was half-way between road and house now.

"There's one of the fellows posting himself at the corner of the house!" chattered the peering boy.

Then, in the faint starlight, Ted caught the dull glint of light on something silvery—the muzzle of a revolver.

Twisting himself around to the other side of the bush, Ted made out two other figures under a window at the side of the house.

He saw one of them reach up toward the glass.

"It's now or never!" quivered Ted. "I suppose they'll kill me, but I don't care!"

Then suddenly his voice rose—weak and quavering at first, but gaining strength by the time that he had uttered the first two syllables.

"Help! Wake up! Thieves!"

In the stillness of the dark night his voice seemed fitted to travel for miles.

"Help! Catch the thieves!"

Then he heard a commotion indeed from the direction of the house.

Crack! Whizz-zz!

A bullet cut off a spray of leaves just over Ted Trim's head.

Down to the ground went Ted, intent only on getting out of the path of bullets.

Yet, in another instant he leaped to his feet again.

All three of the thieves were in flight, and headed his way, as if intent on finding and killing the one who had given the alarm.

From an upper window of the house, too, a pistol flashed and cracked.

"Scoot, Gyp!" thrilled the boy.

He turned to run himself.

But the foremost of the thieves was now close to him.

Ted stumbled, but tried to straighten up.

He heard a quick step behind him.

Whack! It felt to the dazed boy as if something as heavy as a house had fallen on his head.

He had been struck by the butt of an emptied pistol.

Around spun Ted, clutching at air as the thieves dashed past.

Whizz-zz! A shot from the porch caught him.

Down went Ted, knowing nothing more that happened.

Nothing, that is, until he heard a voice saying:

"Nellie, child, what did I tell you this afternoon? You didn't believe me, then, but that boy you wanted me to take into the house lies here. Yes, child, he was one of the thieves. Come here and look for yourself. He isn't dead, or anything like it."

Ted, still more than half in a trance, heard light steps coming across the lawn.

Then he heard Nellie Gray's shuddering voice say:

"And I was so sure that he was honest!"

"Let that teach you a lesson, then, child. Parker, help me to carry this young wretch to the porch. Then you telephone for the police to come here and take care of him. That's my bullet through the young imp's shoulder."

CHAPTER IV.

NO USE!

Ted heard, but chose not to open his eyes.

Yet he shivered.

He could not dodge the horror that came to him with the knowledge that Nellie Gray believed him guilty.

He felt himself being lifted and carried over a lawn.

Then he was laid down, almost roughly, on the porch.

Gyp followed, whining. As soon as Ted lay stretched out on the boards the yellow dog thrust its cold nozzle against one of his hands.

"Kick that cur out," directed Mr. Gray.

"Don't you do it, Parker," broke in the girl, quickly.

"Pardon me, papa, but I didn't want to see the poor animal suffer. See how faithful it is to its master!"

"Let the dog stay, then," assented Mr. Gray. "But, Nellie, I want you to go into the house. This is no sort of a scene for you."

"And I am going to beg you to let me stay, papa. I—I can't help being interested in this unhappy, unfortunate boy."

"Hm!" grunted her father. "He doesn't need sympathy. What he wants are handcuffs."

"Oh, papa! Then you are going to have him arrested?"

"Naturally. But first wait. I must run into the library and look around, though I'm sure the thieves didn't have time to get at work. Parker, watch the scoundrel."

As Ted heard the old man's steps going down the hallway and turn in at a room, the boy gave a shudder, sighed and opened his eyes.

Nellie Gray bent quickly over him.

"Oh, then, you have come to?" she inquired.

"Yes, Miss Nellie."

"Oh, I hope you're not badly hurt. But papa was excited and fired at you."

"That bullet-scratch in the shoulder ain't nothing, miss," the servant Parker broke in. "It took the skin off, and that's all. This youngster was faking his hurt when he found he couldn't get away."

"I didn't ask you, Parker," replied the girl, gently, but in a tone calculated to stop the man's tongue.

"I tried to give you warning," sighed Ted, as he sat slowly up.

"Don't you try to get away there!" warned Parker, bringing a shot-gun to bear close to the boy.

"Don't you dare shoot, Parker!" screamed the girl.

"I ain't going to try to get away," protested Ted. "It wouldn't be any use anyway. Hard luck and I are traveling together!"

"But why did you help those men try to break in here?" asked Miss Nellie, fixing her sorrowful eyes on his.

"I didn't help 'em!" burst, indignantly, from Ted. "I shouted out and gave the alarm. Don't you folks know that?"

"Did you hear this boy shout, Parker?" demanded the girl, eagerly.

"No, miss," replied the servant, stolidly.

"But you did, didn't you?" asked the girl, turning, appealingly, to Ted.

"All safe in the library. The thieves didn't have time to get to work," announced Mr. Gray, coming briskly out to the porch.

"Then you won't have this poor boy arrested, papa?" appealed the girl.

"I ought to, child. It's a bad trick to turn thieves loose."

"But he says he isn't a thief, papa. He claims that he yelled and gave the alarm."

"Yes; that sounds likely," laughed the old man, grimly.

"It's all stuff and rot," observed Parker, gruffly.

"I didn't ask your opinion, Parker," broke in the girl, stiffly. "Papa, I think I believe this boy's claim. Something must have waked you up, or how would you have heard just in the nick of time?"

"Do you claim that you gave the alarm?" demanded Mr. Gray, fixing his gaze on our hero's face.

"I certainly did do it, sir," Ted protested. "What else would I be doing around here, sir?"

"Just the point," clicked in Mr. Gray, quickly. "What were you doing around here, anyway? How did you come to be here, if you didn't come with the burglars? If you weren't here on their business, how did you come to be here at all at this hour of the night. Answer that, boy, and be careful, or you'll pick your own yarn full of holes."

Mr. Gray leaned back against one of the pillars of the porch, smiling as if he thought he had put a question that couldn't be answered easily.

But Ted told the straight story—told it without frills or gloss—of how, homeless and moneyless, he had been compelled to sleep in the woods; of how he had heard the burglars.

"And I heard you speaking, this afternoon, to your daughter, sir, about bonds in the library safe. I knew they meant this place, and so I followed—to give the alarm."

"And why did you take all that trouble?" questioned Mr. Gray. "Now, really, why did you care, boy, whether I was robbed or not?"

"I didn't," blurted Ted, "except that it might bring trouble to your daughter, Miss Nellie."

"Oh, that's good!" chuckled Mr. Gray, throwing back his head and laughing. "How long have you known my daughter?"

"Since the afternoon."

"And what has she done to make you so intensely loyal to her?"

"She was nice to me," Ted answered, simply.

"Oh, nice, eh? And that led you to risk your life for her?"

"Well, you see, sir," Ted replied, simply, and trying to choke back the tears, "it was the first time that I can remember any one being nice to me."

Mr. Gray shook himself suddenly, then looked down at the ragged, forlorn, shaking boy—yes, shaking, for now the dew had soaked through Ted's thin clothing, chilling him.

"Well, there may be something in that," muttered the man. "Nellie has a way of being nice, and you certainly don't look as if life had been over kind with you."

"Oh, papa, you will let him go, won't you?" begged Nellie. "And give him a little money to start him on his way."

"I don't know," said Mr. Gray, slowly, thrusting both hands in his pockets and looking very thoughtfully at Ted.

"But, papa, you simply can't have him arrested when there's a shadow of doubt in your mind as to whether he's guilty. It isn't your way to be unjust."

"I hope it isn't," replied Mr. Gray.

"Then you won't have him arrested," went on Miss Nellie, triumphantly. "Now, since you admit that he may be innocent, you can also see that life hasn't been very kind to this boy. What do you do, papa, with the very unfortunate? You often help them on their way, don't you? You provide them with a little money to make a happier start."

"Hold on right there, if you please, Miss Nellie," Ted butted in, rising boldly to his feet.

"What's the matter, now?" asked the girl, in surprise.

"I don't want any money—any help," Ted flushed. "There's just one thing you two can do that will make me happy. Nothing else can."

"Then what is it?" asked Mr. Gray, curiously.

"Just say that you're satisfied I didn't have any guilty part in the attempt to rob you. I didn't—that's the honest truth—and I'd like to hear you both say you believe me."

His eyes were full of appeal as he looked from father to daughter.

Parker sniffed very quietly but unbelievably, but for that matter Ted didn't care much what that fellow thought.

"I'd like to believe you," said Mr. Gray, seriously. "Will that be enough?"

"It'll be only a beggar's mite," smiled Ted, sorrowfully. "It's better than nothing, but it isn't the same as believing me, sir."

"I do believe you!" cried Nellie, suddenly and impulsively. "Here's my pledge."

Prettily she held out her hand.

Ted stared in dumb amazement for a moment. Then, slowly understanding, he took her hand in his for just an instant.

"Thank you," he said. "And now, I'll offer you some proof that I told the truth. Feel here on my head."

Taking off his tattered remnant of a hat, he carried Miss Nellie's hand to a large and very sore bump on the top of his head.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried the girl, in dismay. "You have been hurt! Papa, just feel this fearful lump."

"How did you get it?" asked Mr. Gray, after having put his finger tips on the lump.

"When I shouted the thieves turned and ran past me. One of them hit me on the head with something, and then I fainted. It was that that stretched me out—not your bullet, sir, which must have zipped me just as I started to fall."

"It's fearfully sore, isn't it?" asked Nellie, again feeling cautiously of the lump on Ted's head.

"It's sore, of course," smiled Ted, grimly. "But I don't mind it—not a bit. I'm used to hard blows, you know."

"But I must do something to dress it," cried the girl. "Wait just a jiffy, and I'll be back with things. Parker, you come with me."

She flew into the house, the servant walking stiffly after her.

Mr. Gray, still standing at the edge of the porch, laughed as he regarded Ted as curiously as ever.

"I don't know whether you realize what a lucky youngster you are. Nellie doesn't stop at anything when she gets interested in one. I'm not sure that she'll let up on me until I've given you a partnership in my city business house. And that child generally has her own way."

"It's wonderfully fine to have any one to say nice things to you," Ted responded, simply.

"I guess you have found it that way, boy," nodded Mr. Gray, thoughtfully. "But, see here, if you have been leading a—er—well, if you have been just a little bit shady in your life, you'll try to do better after this, won't you?"

"I don't have to try that," Ted retorted, with sudden dignity. "Whether you believe it or not, Mr. Gray, I've always done just as near the straight thing as I could get to it. There's no sneak, no thief in me, sir."

Parker came back just at this instant, bearing a bowl

of water, towels and some bottles. Miss Nellie, in his wake, had other things.

"Now, sit down in this chair," she commanded, "and I'll soon have a lot of the pain out of that poor head."

Swiftly and deftly she bathed and rubbed the great lump, and then added some cooling lotion.

Gyp, in the meantime, stood close by his master, looking up anxiously. A remark of Mr. Gray's about the dog brought on a general talk. Before Ted realized it he had told his hearers nearly everything about himself, though, just as it happened, he did not tell his name.

"There, it ought to ache a good deal less soon," announced Miss Nellie, at last.

"It doesn't ache a bit now," Ted declared gallantly.

Then Nellie turned to her father, whispering:

"You can get him some kind of work with your firm. Won't you give the boy a note to the manager, and make him take money enough to pay his fare to the city? Think how proud you'll be if this boy turns out well later on. Please do what I want."

"Well, child," smiled her father, "you and Parker stay here and talk to your wonder, and I'll go into the library and write some kind of a note to the manager—if I can find a pen."

Mr. Gray stepped inside, but an instant later he shouted down the hallway:

"The rascals came back while we were talking out there. The safe and window are open, and the safe is looted!"

At the first dawn of the words on Ted's brain he leaped to his feet, scudding across the lawn, Gyp pelting after him.

It was a thoughtless move, but the boy's sole impulse was to see if the thieves were still near enough to be caught up with.

"Stop, you scoundrel!" roared Parker.

But Ted did not stop, nor did the man servant dare follow without his gun, which he had taken into the house.

Miss Nellie darted to her father.

The women servants in the house had kept in the background all along, and now did not dare show themselves.

So, for thirty seconds, Ted had a clear field to himself.

He did not catch sight of the thieves, who had had much too good a start.

But now our hero heard Mr. Gray's excited voice, as that gentleman, followed by Parker, came hurrying across the grounds.

"It's jail for that boy, if we get him now—and hanging wouldn't be too good for him!" blared Nellie's father. "The young scoundrel! Worked on our sympathies, to keep us all interested, while his crew came back and cracked the safe right within a hundred feet from us! The clever, wicked young scoundrel! You go that way, Parker, and I'll go this! Shoot the thief on sight if you get near enough to him!"

Near enough they were. But they did not see Ted just then.

For our hero, listening with a despairing sinking at his heart, had dragged himself into a clump of bushes, holding his hand over Gyp's mouth to keep the dog quiet.

CHAPTER V.

A CHANCE.

"Nothing is any use, Gyp. We might just as well be off the earth! I wish we were!"

Ted's tone was almost wholly disheartened.

He had reason enough to be nearly to the limit of despair.

Just at the moment when he had hoped to find something like friends in the Grays all that had flashed in the pan.

He had escaped from that place by waiting until his pursuers had abandoned the chase.

But, after tramping two miles, he had slept in the woods until a little after daylight.

Then it was a tramp again, keeping to the woods most of the time, for Ted had a shrewd suspicion that the police might be on the look-out for him now.

Since the morning before he and Gyp had not eaten.

"It's tough to be hungry when you've got a lot of other troubles, too, ain't it, Gyp?" the boy asked, miserably, of his dog.

Gyp looked up, but could only whine sympathetically.

"See here, doggie, we're a good ten miles from Gray's by this time," muttered Ted, as they came out of the woods to cross a road. "I wonder if it's safe to try to get a big enough job to earn us a meal?"

Climbing over the wall, he halted irresolutely in the road.

There were three pretty little country houses down that road in sight.

"We'll risk it, doggie mine," muttered Ted. "Might as well get hauled in by the police as starve. They have to FEED prisoners, anyway!"

So down the road trudged Ted, closely eyeing the grounds of the first little house that he was coming to.

It was a neat house, and not so very small. It stood well in from the road, surrounded by trees.

"Now, if that ain't luck!" quivered the boy.

For on the porch of this house he saw two women, past middle age, trying, awkwardly, to hammer a lid on a packing case.

Like a flash Ted Trim was over the wall and speeding across the lawn.

Running in his bare feet, it was not Ted's approach but Gyp's joyous bark that announced them.

"Gracious!" gasped one scared woman, looking up hastily and viewing with alarm the ragged youngster hurrying toward her. "Scoot into the house, Mis' Simpson!"

"Don't mind me," begged Ted, as both women showed

signs of fleeing. "I—I saw you needed some one—to nail up that box."

"I believe he is all right," murmured the one who had been addressed as Mrs. Simpson. Then turning to Ted:

"You're really an honest boy, ain't you?"

"I certainly hope I am," came from Ted, as he dragged off what little of hat he wore. "I saw you needed some one to help you nail that case, and perhaps to do some other work, so I hurried in, madam."

"Then why did you come so mighty fast?" quizzed the other woman, suspiciously.

"Because I thought there might be enough work to earn a meal," Ted replied, straight out from the shoulder with his honesty. "I'm hungry enough to run for any job that shows up in sight."

"Say, you look it!" was the frank comment of Mrs. Simpson, as she laid her hammer down on the case. "Boy, you can have the job, and I'm sorry it ain't more. Mirandy, you get into the house and bring out a big plate of that cold corned beef and bread and butter!"

"I dunno——" began Mirandy, hesitatingly.

"Well, I do," snapped her mistress. "And if you don't do it right off quick I'll have to go myself—that's all. Now, hurry up, woman!"

Mirandy disappeared in through the open door.

"Sit down, boy, and wait just a jiffy," commanded Mrs. Simpson, indicating the edge of the porch as a suitable seat.

"But about the job, first?" Ted hinted.

"Don't you think you could hammer better and straighter with something in your stomach?" the woman asked, sharply, but looking at him with kindly curiosity.

"Maybe I could, ma'am," Ted admitted, with an eager smile.

"There you are," said Mirandy, dryly, as she came out with the plate of meat and the bread and butter.

Ted made up his mind, in an instant, that this was not Stingy House. The plate was heaping.

Gyp jumped, barking gleefully.

"Do you mind, ma'am, if I give a part of this to my dog?" Ted asked, appealingly. "You see he's the best chum I've got."

"Don't you dare give any of that to the dog," warned Mrs. Simpson, sharply. "Mirandy, you trot back into the house and get another bit for the dog. Don't get tired too soon, cutting off the meat, either, 'cause we've got to leave it behind to-morrow, what's left."

But Ted waited, in grateful silence, until Gyp's own generous ration was at hand before he began his own meal.

Then how wonderfully good the meal tasted to both these fagged-out wayfarers!

"Now, rest a bit," commanded Mrs. Simpson, as Ted put by the empty plate.

"It's time, now, ma'am, to pay for my meal," smiled happy Ted—happy on a square meal.

"It ain't never right to work on a full stomach," the woman contradicted. "I hope yours is full—eh?"

"If it was any fuller, ma'am," the boy replied, with enthusiasm, "it would burst."

"Then set there and tell me something about yourself," she ordered.

Ted did not start, but he colored a trifle.

"There isn't much to tell, ma'am. I'm just tramping and looking for a job—and not getting it, that's all."

"You've been to school?" she demanded.

"Oh, yes, ma'am."

"Like studying?"

"Yes, ma'am, when I get the chance. That isn't often."

"Would you be glad of a chance to go to school, then?"

"Wouldn't I, though?"

Ted's eyes fairly sparkled at the thought. He had just sense enough, at any rate, to know that the best things in life come more easily when a fellow has a good, solid education.

"But what's the use of talking about it?" he asked, with a sigh, a moment later. "There won't be any chance of that. I've got my living to make."

As soon as Mrs. Simpson would permit, Ted went to work nailing down the lid of the case. He did it in a workmanlike manner, then dragged it into the front hallway.

There were several other jobs to be done, for, as our hero learned, these two lone women were to go to Mrs. Simpson's town home in the morning.

It was an hour from dark when Ted finished the last task under Mrs. Simpson's orders.

"Supper's ready, Mis' Simpson," called Mirandy, poking her head into the parlor, where Ted had just finished a task.

"And we've got the work all done," replied Mrs. Simpson.

"Everything done?" Ted asked.

"Everything, boy."

"Then I'll go, ma'am, so as not to keep you from your supper."

"No, you won't go, either," snapped Mrs. Simpson. "Maybe I'll want to talk with you after supper. If you like reading, there's that magazine and you can go on the porch and read it until I get through supper."

Before our hero could thank her Mrs. Simpson had bustled out, but Ted pounced on that magazine as on a treasure.

Then, out on the porch, in that light of the late day, with Gyp drowsing at his side, Ted tasted the first joys of reading that he had known for some months.

"Read to me," commanded Mrs. Simpson, coming out after her meal.

"What shall I read, ma'am?"

"Anything at all that's right under your thumb."

Ted read, willingly.

"That's enough," commanded the woman, at last. "You read mighty well, boy. You've got some idea of what you're reading. Now, how'd you like to go to school? 'Cause I've been thinking about you. I need a boy. We're

two lone women, and we need something in the house that wears trousers—for protection and to do odd jobs. If you want to stay with me, I'll give you your keep, and some decent clothes, and a chance to go to school. What do you say?"

What could Ted say? He tried, stammeringly, to thank her, but the words nearly choked him.

This was more than he had ever dared look forward to. Mrs. Simpson was a plain, homely woman without any frills, yet our hero had seen enough of the place to realize that she was a woman of some wealth.

She was sharp, but kindly. Ted knew, at the outset, that she would be good to him. It was the finest chance he could have dreamed of.

"Then it's settled, for the present, anyway," she went on, briskly. "You'll stay with me, and have a good home, if you act right. I don't make any promises, mind you, until I know you better. But you'll have your chance. In the morning, before we go away, I'll send you into the village to find something decent to put on you."

She talked on and on with Ted through the early evening. It was plain that she had taken a liking to the boy.

"If you'd like to go to college, maybe that chance will come later on," she said, finally. "I could spare the money to put you through all right. But that'll depend on how you do here. We'll see. I'd like to do it for you, if you've got the right stuff in you. But I ain't making any promises yet, mind you!"

Then came the time to turn in. Ted's head was whirling with happiness by the time that he reached the tidy little room to which Mirandy had piloted him. He had Gyp with him, too. Mrs. Simpson had cheerfully allowed him to take his four-footed chum up into that sweet, wholesome bed-room.

The door closed, Ted sank to the floor, his eyes filling with tears as he reached out and seized the dog in a warm embrace.

"Oh, Gyp, Gyp! Haven't we landed on our feet, though!" whispered the boy, quiveringly. "A home, some one to take interest in you—school and maybe college! Oh, Gyp, old fellow, there are some soft spots on earth!"

Gyp barked his joy, "barked almost in a whisper," as Ted smiled to himself.

For a long time the boy lay there on the floor with his homely yellow dog, whispering to that faithful friend all his hopes for the future.

So long, in fact, did Ted lie there, that he fell asleep, all dressed as he was.

The floor was not hard—not to Ted Trim. It was a sweeter place of rest than any bed in 'Riah Grigg's mean house.

Gr-r-r-r! Gyp's growl was not loud, but he seized his master's ragged coat between his teeth and shook it.

"Eh?" muttered Ted, sleepily. "What's up?"

Gyp, after another shake, ran toward the window.

"Something doing out there?" wondered Ted, rising quickly and going softly to the open window.

Something doing, indeed!

As the boy looked down he saw two figures at the dining-room window directly beneath him.

They were rough-looking customers, not at all like the well-dressed safe-crackers he had seen the night before.

These men had two bundles tied up in sheets, and a dress suit case that Ted instantly recognized as belonging to Mrs. Simpson.

"Do people break in and rob every night in this part of the country?" gasped staggered Ted.

He was pretty near the truth. Just at present this section of the state was suffering from an epidemic of burglary.

Each of the thieves below picked up one of the bundles. Then they lifted the dress suit case, as if it were heavy, between them, and started softly away.

That move galvanized Ted Trim into action.

"Ted, old fellow, this is where you act! This is a chance to save your reputation. This is where you can show what good there is in you! Butt right in!"

It was not much of a drop to the ground.

The thieves, by this time, were fifty yards away at the least.

Catching at the sill as he crossed it, Ted Trim poised and dropped.

Then, silently, but with the speed of a sprinter, Ted started on the trail.

Yelp! Gyp, having daringly leaped after him, was on the warpath, too!

CHAPTER VI.

THE ANSWER.

Yap! yap! flared Gyp, bounding at the escaping thieves.

"Now we've got you! Drop that stuff!" called Ted, sharply.

Like a flash both thieves let go of the dress suit case, and turned, running in opposite directions.

"Go after that one, Gyp!" called Ted, pointing to his left.

Then he pounced upon the dress suit case, snatching it up with both hands.

Gyp had started, true to the command. Ted darted off after the other fellow.

The case was heavy, and the thief fleet of foot.

Ted wanted to drop his burden, but feared that, if he did, the other thief might return and get it.

"Hold up, there!" called the boy, sharply. "If you don't I'll hurt you when I get you!"

It was largely bluff, but Ted meant as much of it as he could back up.

His man was headed straight across the lawn for the road.

Heavy as his burden was, Trim managed to make fairly good speed with it.

He was rapidly overtaking the man, in fact, when the latter, close to the wall, stopped suddenly and turned.

"Give me that bag and get back, kid, or I'll do you as sure as fate!" gruffed the fellow.

"Not afraid of you!" clicked Ted. He dropped the dress suit case, but rushed at his man.

"Get back there, or I'll cut you!" warned the thief.

"Skiddoo, and leave the goods, or you'll have to cut!" quivered Ted.

He waited, just an instant, poised on his toes for the spring.

Seeing that his pursuer meant business, the thief dropped his bundle, leaping forward with his jack-knife open.

There was no help for it. Ted wouldn't run and he couldn't submit to being carved.

As by instinct, he jumped to meet his enemy.

They grappled, and down they went, but Ted, much the lighter, was underneath.

"Now, you young idiot!" growled the brute on top.

He tried to slash the boy.

But Ted got the wrist of that knife-hand, and held on for grim life.

Cunningly, the fellow tried to shift the knife to the other hand.

But panting Ted had been on the lookout for this move.

He caught at both the brute's wrists, gave a sudden roll, and now they lay on the ground, side by side, fast-locked and fighting for the knife.

For just a second the ruffian got a hand free to use his knife.

He slashed, but Ted glanced his wrist aside.

Slash! Ted's coat was more ragged than ever now, but his skin was but barely scratched.

"Help! help! Thieves! Murder!"

The two women up at the house, roused by Gyp's barks and by Ted's calls, had reached their windows and had guessed that thieves were about.

Mrs. Simpson was calling lustily for help, Mirandy adding shrill shrieks for aid.

"You'd better get out quick!" quivered Ted. "If you don't, you're caught."

"And you'll be finished!" came the snarling retort.

Yap! yap! Pat-pat! pat-pat! Gyp, having realized that his master was not following, had turned and come in search of Ted. Up the road the driver of a buggy was whipping his horse into speed.

Gr-r-r-r! Ouch! Gyp had a good bite at the thief's thigh.

"Ouch!"

With a wrench the thief tore himself free of Ted, snatched up his bundle, and darted for the wall.

He cleared it, crossed the road flying, and went over the opposite wall, fading in between the trees.

But Ted remained behind only long enough to seize that dress suit case. Then he, too, got over the wall.

A horse almost ran him down as the driver reined in hard.

Then the driver leaped down into the road.

"In there! Come on with me, and we'll get that one!" quivered Ted to the man in the road.

"We may not get him, but we'll be sure of you!" gritted the man.

Flop! He made a pounce, seizing Ted.

"But I'm not the thief!" panted Ted. "He's escaping—in there in the woods."

"If you're not a thief, you're a good substitute for one," grinned Ted's captor, gripping him tighter than ever. "Ouch!"

For Gyp had silently closed in and taken a liberal bite at the man's leg.

"Stop that, Gyp! Get back, old fellow. It's all right," Ted assured his dog-friend.

"If I had a gun I'd kill that blamed cur," gritted the man who held on to Ted.

"You've let the thief get away," quivered our hero.

"Up to the house for you, anyway!" ordered his captor. "Get a start on you!"

"But I'm no thief," quivered the boy, now becoming indignant. "I belong at Mrs. Simpson's. I live there. I set off after the thieves, and got this suit case away from 'em."

"So you belong with Mrs. Simpson, do you?" smiled the man, who still held Ted as in a vise.

"Of course I do."

"Well, you didn't this morning," answered the man, positively. "I'm her next-door neighbor and ought to know."

"I tell you, you're making a huge mistake," declared Trim. "Yet, since you won't believe me, and won't let me go after that thief, why, then, come up to the house and find out that I'm all right."

"No harm in that," grinned the captor. "We'll go now, and take care you don't drop that grip."

Leaving his horse at the roadside, and taking a twisting grip in the boy's collar, the neighbor got them both over the wall and on a brisk walk for the house.

"It's all right," Mrs. Simpson, "called this neighbor, cheerily. "I'm here—Mr. Ewan—and I've got one of the thieves."

"You think you have!" Ted taunted.

"Well, come along up to the house, and see how much they think you belong there," grimaced Ewan.

He marched Ted straight up to the front door, Gyp following dejectedly.

It was some minutes before Mrs. Simpson had dressed sufficiently to come down and open the door.

Instantly the rays of the light that she was carrying fell on our hero.

"Why, land sakes—it's that boy!" she cried.

"Yes, Mrs. Simpson, it's me, of course," Ted cried, hastily. "I——"

"He says he lives here," Ewan explained.

"Gracious, if it ain't that tramp boy!" sounded Mirandy's shrill voice. "Now, I said he wasn't any better'n——"

"Mirandy, be still!"

"I'll hold on to him!" promised Ewan, grimly.

"Mrs. Simpson," Ted tried to go on, but his captor shook him.

"Now, stop, all of you, for a moment," commanded Ewan, feeling bound to take command as the only man present. "Don't speak, except to answer me. Mrs. Simpson, you recognize this boy, and admit that you had let him into your house."

"Yes, and expected to do for him," replied that good woman.

"Instead of which," jeered Mr. Ewan, "he tried to do for you."

"Take him to jail!" shrieked Mirandy.

"Mrs. Simpson, my dog barked, and woke me up," explained Ted. "I dropped from the window. There were two of the thieves. Each had a bundle, and they carried this suit case between them. I chased and they dropped the case. I chased the other thief, and he turned on me—tried to stab me. We had a fight, but my dog bit the fellow, and he got free and put off. Then this gentleman drove up. If he had helped me, instead of interfering we'd have had one of the thieves."

"Oh, indeed?" queried the woman, coldly.

Ted gave a start of amazement. He hadn't looked for this.

"You don't believe me?" he gasped.

"Under the circumstances I should say I didn't," denied the woman, shaking her head, positively.

"Then I'm down and out, and that's all there is to it," gasped Ted.

"You say you woke up and jumped right out of the window?"

"Yes, ma'am. That's the truth."

"Then how did you come to have all your duds on, ready for the jump?" sniffed Mrs. Simpson.

Ted gave another tremendous start at realizing how his being dressed told against him.

"Don't you believe a word of that rot, Mrs. Simpson," jeered Neighbor Ewan.

"I don't," snapped Mrs. Simpson. "I'm no such fool as that!"

"There was another just such case over in Rossville last night," Ewan recollected, suddenly. "By Jove, I believe this is just as likely to be the same boy. Yes, you bet it is," he added, triumphantly, as Ted quivered, trembled and gasped. "Over in Rossville, thieves robbed the safe of a man named Gray. The boy helped in the job. By Jove, we'll hold this boy and communicate with Gray. If this proves to be the same boy we've made a lucky catch. A lucky catch! I should say so!"

But that was just when a catch proved to be not a catch!

For Ted Trim, swelling up with grim despair, suddenly exploded into action.

Ewan had a portly stomach. Into that stomach Ted

drove with both clenched fists, and with such good effect that his captor collapsed.

"Ouch—the young villain!" gurgled the neighbor, sinking down to a seat on the ground.

But Ted, free for an instant, did not stop to see what had happened.

Away he raced for that which was dearer than life—liberty!

Yap! yap! Gyp was at his side, yet ever turning to look back and make sure that pursuit was not close.

Nor did Ted stop until he had run a half a mile and there was no sound of pursuit to the rear.

"But there are telephones," he remembered, suddenly.

At that, he turned into the nearest woods.

"Oh, what a loss!" he half-sobbed, as he plunged on blindly through the dark woods. "But I had to cut. Mrs. Simpson would never have believed me. Especially, not with Mr. Gray coming over to identify me. And if Miss Nellie should see me in the hands of the police! I'd die! Oh, Gyp, old fellow, I don't suppose you can understand a word of this. But it's fierce to have everything good in life opened up to you, and then have it all fade in one flash!"

It was just before daybreak when the boy finished his trudging tramp for a while. He figured that he had gone at least six miles through the woods. Very likely he had, but, though he did not dream of it, he had tramped almost in a circle.

"Gyp, old fellow, even the hunted must rest once in a while," sighed the boy, sinking down to the ground. "If I fall asleep, I can trust you to guard me, anyway."

He did sleep, and for hours he slept on, and Gyp watched as faithfully as a dog could.

But at last, in the bright forenoon light, a bird of gay feathers hopped over the forest ground.

Away raced Gyp, and the chase proved a long one.

Then, while Ted slept, there came other visitors in that stretch of woods.

Two men came forward, halted in eager surprise, and looked at each other.

Then, while one remained on guard, the other crept back to the road.

Ted, rolling drowsily, slept on, dreamed on.

But he woke when a hand shook him roughly at the shoulder.

"Time to wake up, boy!" sounded a gruff voice.

Ted Trim did wake up—sat up.

"You here?" he gasped, in instant dismay.

Among the eight or ten people who were staring curiously at him were Mrs. Simpson and Mr. Gray—Nellie's father!

CHAPTER VII.

THREE KINDS OF LUCK.

With a wild cry of anguish Ted Trim leaped to his feet. There was in his eyes, as he glanced swiftly around him,

the look that comes into the eyes of the hunted, cornered wild beast.

"Now, we don't want you to get away this time," grinned the man who stood in front of the boy. "You won't do it, either."

Ted was not so sure of that.

All his former meekness had vanished in these last few days.

He was free, a citizen of the world, nowadays.

He fully intended to keep his liberty. No man should imprison him, or tell him that he should go to one place when he longed to go to another.

If any one got in his way, so much the worse for the meddler.

Our hero did not want to do harm to any one. That was contrary to his whole nature.

But, if he could not have a quiet corner of the earth, called Home, then he panted for the whole world to roam in.

The man in front of him wore a badge that proclaimed him to be an officer.

Another officer was just behind him.

But Ted knew that he could punch one in the stomach, then wheel upon the other like a flash and do the same—then bolt for it as fast as he could!

Gyp, the staunch and faithful, would help by biting any one who tried to hinder the boy.

But—and this thought stayed him: The officers, being armed, would probably shoot at the sharp-toothed, "scrappy" dog.

"Gyp mustn't be hurt," quivered Ted Trim. "He's the only friend I've got. No matter! I'll lie low and wait!"

All this had flashed through his mind in the first few seconds that he was on his feet, staring wildly at his hunters.

"That's the boy!" rasped Mrs. Simpson. "Oh, you ungrateful, wicked wretch!"

"It's the same youth who helped the burglars at my house," nodded Mr. Gray. "I'm glad you sent for me. I identify him positively. And you'll find the scratch of my bullet on his left shoulder."

"Here it is," cried the officer behind Ted, baring the boy's shoulder through the rags and revealing the path of the bullet.

"Bracelets," grinned the officer in front of Ted.

They held him, but the boy did not struggle while they snapped the circles of steel around his wrists. He was thinking of the fate of Gyp.

Mr. Gyp was thinking for himself. He did not like the looks of things, and so growled, showing his teeth.

"Be still, Gyp," ordered his master. "It's all right, old fellow."

"Kick the cur off anyway," advised one of the bystanders.

But Gyp, who had gotten back just in time to find how dearly his chase after a bird had cost his young master, was in no temper for further surprises.

So he showed his teeth wickedly as he backed off.

"Better shoot the cur," advised the man who had first discovered Ted asleep.

"See here, if you dare do that," raged the boy, his eyes suddenly aflame and his whole bearing threatening, "then I swear I'll break out of jail—somehow—and kill the man who's mean enough to kill my poor dog!"

"That shows you how desperate a character you've caught, officers," warned Mr. Gray.

"I don't care," Ted Trim retorted, sullenly. "That dog's the only thing on earth that cares a rap about me. No man that is a man would have the heart to hurt the poor beast."

"There, there—that's all right," soothed one of the constables. "We won't hurt the pup if he minds his own business. Come along."

Without a thought of resisting, Trim allowed himself to be led along. He was astonished when he found how close to the road he had been sleeping.

There was the automobile in which Mr. Gray had hurried over to this town.

Into it that gentleman climbed now, taking Mrs. Simpson and two of the men in with him.

"It ain't a long walk for you, younker," smiled one of the constables. "Not more than a quarter of a mile."

"I'm good for it," Ted assented, moodily.

Gyp tried to follow along at his heels. Driven off, the brute retreated to a little distance, then followed slyly.

Into the little bit of a village Ted was marched, all of the few people there turning out to gape at him.

"We hain't got a lock-up here—don't have enough need for one," explained one of the pair of constables. "And our justice won't be back till afternoon. So I reckon we'll have to take you into the town hall, and watch you."

"It's all the same to me," Ted nodded, gloomily.

So into the town hall he was taken, and there all the village folks came to stare at the desperate young criminal.

From the talk Ted learned that the officers had earned a two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar reward that Zenas Gray had offered for his capture. Also that it was expected that Mrs. Simpson would add something more.

The handcuffs were removed from Ted's wrists, to his huge relief, and then one of the constables was kindly enough to inquire:

"Want anything to eat, boy? You know, prisoners are entitled to be fed."

"I guess I might eat a little," Trim admitted.

So one of the villagers brought in food.

"Say," pleaded the boy, "can't I give a bit of this to my dog?"

"Why, yes, if we can find him," agreed the officer.

"Take me to the door a second, and I'll find him. He won't be far off."

So the constables, one gripping Ted's either arm tightly, led him as far as the door.

"Gyp! Gyp! Here, old Gyp," Ted called, loudly.

Out from under a box in the yard across the way scurried the yellow dog and came cavorting toward his master.

Inside, Gyp ate with relish. Then, however, he was driven out again.

Always, through the day, there was a crowd of the curious. They came in, singly and in pairs, staring at the boy as at a freak.

There was not a moment when it would have been possible to bolt for freedom. The constables, understanding that, were not mean enough to handcuff their captive.

Late in the afternoon there came another visitor, and a most unwelcome one—'Riah Griggs.

That worthy came stamping into the town hall, followed by smirking Fluke.

"That's the youngster!" denounced the farmer, wrathily, as he glared at Ted. "That's the young scoundrel. He stole three hundred dollars from me before he ran away!"

For a few seconds Ted sat as if stricken dumb. Then he leaped to his feet, quivering.

"What's that?" he panted. "'Riah Griggs, you infernal liar, take that back!"

"I won't take nothin' back!" glared the farmer. "Ye stole it, and ye know ye did. I had the money hidden in the blue chiny bowl in the parlor, and no one but my wife and the minister knew where it was hidden. But the money's gone, an' you stole it!"

"It's a rotten lie, from beginning to end," flared the boy.

"It's the truth, an' ye know it," asserted Griggs, positively. "The minister came to the house yesterday, and then we found the money gone. Where's that money, Ted Trim?"

"Oh, bosh! I haven't got it, and never did have it," retorted Ted, dropping back to the settee on which he had been sitting.

"Did ye find any money on him, officers?" demanded Griggs.

"Not a penny," replied one of the constables. "The kid had nothing in his pockets but holes."

"What did ye do with the money?" demanded Griggs, advancing upon the boy so fiercely that Ted was tempted to believe that the farmer half believed his own charge.

It was necessary, indeed, for the constables to force the enraged farmer back or he would have harmed Ted.

"It will be another charge against the youngster, anyway," said one of the constables. "There's enough against him now to hang him—almost."

'Riah Griggs demanded so repeatedly where his money was that Ted, finally, stung to desperation, leaped to his feet.

"If you've really lost any money, Griggs, then it's most likely it was stolen by your own son, Fluke! He's sneak enough to do anything wicked!"

The smirk faded out of Fluke's pudgy face.

"Yah, yah, ye thief!" snarled the boy. "Ye think ye can put it on me, do ye?"

"Shut up, Fluke! Don't waste breath on the brat! Nobody's suspecting ye, Fluke," roared his father. "Ted

Trim, ye beast, I'll make ye sorry for the day ye robbed me!"

Soon after the farmer stamped off, followed by his worthy son.

The daylight began to fade. Villagers lost their interest in the prisoner. The absent justice, it was said now, would not be back until late in the evening. Until he came and signed the commitment papers our hero could not be sent over to the safe county jail.

"I s'pose you'd like to eat now, younker," hinted one of the constables, after lighting a couple of the lamps in the hall.

"Yes, if you please," the boy answered.

"All right, I'll go out and see if I can find you something. Watch him, Jack!"

The remaining constable, who was a big fellow, lighted his pipe and smoked thoughtfully.

"Why, if there ain't my pup!" cried Ted, suddenly, pointing into one of the dark corners of the hall.

The constable turned to look.

Plump! It was a heavy blow—a fearful one it seemed to the dazed victim.

For Ted Trim, hungry for liberty, yearning wildly for life in the free and open, struck out with all his might.

He drove his fist into the constable's stomach region.

Down went that startled officer, not seriously hurt, but with the wind so completely jolted out of him that he couldn't yell.

Near the door was a cart stake that some one had carelessly left there.

Seizing this and brandishing it, Ted started savagely out of doors.

Scurry! Rush! Prowling nearby, Gyp was at his heels in a twinkling. As if realizing that stealth was necessary, the dog uttered not a single yelp.

Down the street raced Ted. Nothing but a bullet could stop him now.

A woman saw the fleeing boy, and recognized him.

"There's the prisoner escaping!" she shrieked on the still summer air. "Oh, he's murdered the constables and got away. Help! Murder!"

Ted heard other sounds behind him as he fled. He knew that chase would swiftly organize.

"Confound the chatterer!" he ground.

He had reached the street corner now.

Ahead, under the starlight, he caught the indistinct gleam of a river's water. At redoubled speed he dashed on for the river, for he knew how to swim like a fish!

Before he gained the river he heard the sounds of pursuit behind him. His path of flight had been discovered. Recapture swooped not far to the rear.

Down to the rear of the street, out upon a little wharf, dashed Ted Trim.

Splash! He was in the river, swimming under water for the first hundred yards out. Gyp was not far behind him.

As he heard the pursuers on the wharf Ted dove again, coming up at last still further from shore.

He swam noiselessly now, too far out to fear detection in the darkness.

He heard boats putting off, and so swam swiftly down the stream.

None of the pursuers got near enough to see him. Ted floated with the stream for half an hour.

Gyp, twice tired of the water, went to land and ran along the shore for a little way before rejoining his floating master.

"It's cool out here, and safe, anyway," murmured Ted, who, being wholly at home in the water, felt no need of getting ashore in a hurry.

Flare! Something bright gleamed in his eyes.

"What's that?" wondered the boy, turning around for a better look.

But a distant chug of machinery, and the sight of a long row of lights over the water, told the story to him. A river steamer was coming down the stream, picking up its way by the aid of its search-light.

Ted lay on the water for a few moments, watching the approaching craft.

"Say!" he suddenly murmured. "That's great!"

Quickly over on to his back he rolled, swimming in that position until he had put himself almost in the track of the oncoming steamboat.

Flare! The light was so bright in his eyes now that he had to close them.

But in another moment he knew that he had been seen, for he could hear the steamboat's engine-room bells clanging.

"She's stopping," muttered Ted, joyously, as he opened his eyes a bit and saw the boat slowing up. Then he was obliged to close his eyes again, for the steamboat folks were keeping their glare turned full upon him as if afraid to lose him.

He heard a boat being lowered, heard the sound of moving row-locks.

"There he is! Careful now!"

Then a row-boat moved gracefully up beside him, and reaching hands seized him, drew him into the boat.

"Oh, thank you!" murmured hypocrite Ted, opening his eyes slowly. "I was almost gone!"

"Poor youngster!" muttered one of the sailors.

"Lay him in the bottom of the boat," directed the steamboat officer at the tiller. "You're all right now, youngster! Hot coffee when we get you on board."

"Yap! yap!" came anxiously from the water.

"Oh, please don't leave my dog!" cried Ted, almost too lustily for the part he was playing.

"Sure we won't," promised one of the sailors, bending over the gunwales. "In with you, ki-yi!"

Then back to the waiting steamboat they rowed. A crowd, waiting at one of the gangways, cheered lustily.

Up on board Ted was hustled. The captain was waiting at the gangway to question him.

"Fell out of a sailboat," lied Ted, who felt that real explanations might be dangerous.

"Where do you live?" demanded the captain.

"Down the river, a long way," lied Ted, pointing vaguely downstream.

"Ricketts City?" persisted the captain.

"Yes," replied Ted, hoping that the place was a good distance away.

"How did you get way up here, then?" was the captain's next question.

But Ted leaned heavily against the rail, closing his eyes, as if he were fainting.

And in that instant Ted Trim also shifted his right foot.

For, in glancing downward, his eager eyes had lighted on a wallet lying there.

"I'll be all right soon," he said, faintly, to those who crowded about.

The captain left him, to get the craft under way again.

Flop! Ted had dropped his tattered hat. When he straightened up again with it in his hands he had the pocket book inside the hat.

One by one the passengers lost their interest and moved away.

At last Trim found himself alone.

"Now, then!" he cried, eagerly, after a stealthy look around him.

He opened the wallet. Greenbacks—a fat little pack of them. Feverishly he counted them.

"Sixty dollars! Gracious! A real, decent start in life!" Then, after an instant: "No, sir! It ain't a decent start. Ted Trim, I'm ashamed of you! Aren't you ashamed of me, too, Gyp?"—looking down at the dog.

Not losing another second the boy braced up. He went in search of the captain, whom he found on the hurricane deck just below the bridge.

"I found it," Ted confessed. "Some one in the crowd that was standing around me must have dropped it. There's sixty dollars here!"

"And you didn't feel like keeping it?" questioned the captain, looking curiously at the boy as he received the wallet.

"Of course not. It wasn't mine."

"See here, lad," replied the captain, after a few moments of thought, "come down below and show me just where you found this wallet."

Ted led the way and pointed out the spot of discovery.

"I don't believe anybody in the crowd dropped it," said the captain, slowly. "See here, lad. I don't propose to go around asking folks, for then there'd be some people claiming the money who had no right to it. And I don't believe anybody now on board lost this. To my mind, it was lost by some person who went ashore off this gangway at the last stop. You're an honest fellow. Now, I'm going to let you into a secret. I'm honest, too. When people lose money on this boat they're supposed to come and report it to me. So I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll keep this wallet, and put you ashore at Ricketts City, our last stop. You come

to me there again in a week. If nobody has proved property on this wallet by that time I'll hand it over to you as the finder. And I'll lend you five dollars anyway. Now, shut up—no thanks! Lad, the first time I ever set foot on a steamboat's deck I was as ragged as you are. I hope with all my heart that this money comes to you in a week's time."

It was one o'clock in the morning when Ted and Gyp went ashore at Ricketts City.

For a week, on the borrowed five, our hero kept going all right.

At the end of that time the wallet and its contents were turned over to him.

Ted Trim, still as ragged as a boy could be, was now fifty-five dollars and some loose change to the good!

A start in life!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEW LIFE.

Young Mr. Edward Trim, well-dressed, and with a well-fed look, strolled into the office of the New Empire Hotel at Barber, Missouri.

At his heels trotted one of the sleekest yellow dogs imaginable—Gyp, who wore on his neck a very handsome collar.

"Your mail, Mr. Trim," said the clerk, respectfully, as he handed a packet of letters to our hero.

Ted took them, glancing carelessly at the envelopes.

He stood there, while he opened the letters and glanced through them, while Gyp, settling near his master's feet, snored contentedly through a doggy dream.

Was this Ted Trim a few years later?

Not a bit of it!

It was the same old Ted Trim, hardly a particle older, but vastly improved in every way.

It was about the first of September in the same year.

Ted had got on fast indeed.

Everything now seemed the smoothest, easiest sailing.

Yet the change had come about in the simplest fashion.

In Ricketts City, just after his windfall, our hero had gone about in search of work.

One of the places that he dropped into was a branch office of a company that sold steam reapers for use on the great, fertile farms of the middle west.

The manager was talking to a customer at the time Ted approached. He explained the workings of a big sample reaper that stood on the floor.

Ted, having nothing better to do, listened attentively.

"It's one of the simplest machines in the world," went on the manager, "yet our fool farmers, who are no kind of machinists, are always getting this reaper out of order. Then we have to send a man to get it running again. We have a whole staff of machinists that we pay seventy-five

dollars a month and traveling expenses, just to do the things that our farmer customers ought to be able to do for themselves."

Ted pricked up his ears, and did some more listening.

As soon as the visitor had gone, and the manager was alone, our hero went straight up to the manager.

"I've just been thinking," he said, quietly, "that I'd like one of those seventy-five dollar jobs."

"What's that, young man?"

"One of those seventy-five dollar jobs, keeping your machines in order among the farmers," Ted answered, coolly.

"What do you know about our machines?" demanded the manager, eyeing this "fool boy," as he thought him.

"Nothing at all," Ted admitted, promptly.

"Then what makes you think you could repair one?"

"Because I never saw the thing in machinery that I couldn't learn to boss in a few hours," Ted replied truthfully.

He had always had the greatest craze—and knack, too—for mastering difficult machines.

"One of those natural geniuses, eh?" half sneered the manager.

"Try me, please," begged Ted. "Show me the machine, and see what I can do. Do you understand the machine yourself, sir?"

Having it thus "put up to him," the manager took Ted Trim out into a shop to inspect a machine that was in perfect running order.

The manager was soon surprised to see how quickly this apt boy picked up the working details of the thing.

"Now, come over to this reaper, which is broken down," continued the manager. "See what is wrong with it, and how you would go to work to get it in running order."

"Nothing wrong but this gearing off, and this crank pin worn too smooth," reported Ted, after a ten minutes' look.

"Good enough," nodded the manager. "That's what does ail the machine."

He kept Ted there for the rest of the afternoon, and, at its end, said:

"Trim, in the morning I'm going a few miles out into the country to tinker up a machine myself for a farmer. You report and go along with me, and I can soon tell whether you're worth a job."

Ted got that job, at seventy-five dollars a month and traveling expenses—first, because he could do the work, and, second, because he did not drink liquors, as too many of the company's traveling men did.

But that had not been the end of his good fortune.

After being out on the road for a few weeks Ted reported to the house that he was in a position to send in an order for a machine.

The house replied that, in that case, he would receive the one hundred and twenty dollars' commission paid to salesmen.

From then on Ted's rise had been rapid. He was still on his seventy-five dollar job, but, in addition, he was earning many commissions through sales of the machine.

And now, at the near-start of the reaping season, he was on the threshold of what he hoped would turn out to be a "big" season.

Few boys had ever made a quicker start in the world. Our hero was thinking of it now as he walked over with his packet of letters to a chair at the office window.

"Gyp, old fellow," he murmured, under his breath, as he looked down at the still faithful old yellow dog, "we're playing in the biggest kind of luck. And what luck, too! Why, at anything else I couldn't earn much more than board money. And here I have over nine hundred saved and money coming in faster every week! Whew!"

A mist got before the boy as he thought over old times.

"'Riah Griggs' slave not so very long ago," he murmured, thoughtfully. "Then literally kicked off the earth. No one seemed to want me. The few who did seem inclined to give me a chance, soon turned against me and wanted to see me jailed. And now—on the road to wealth!"

As he turned up one of the envelopes in his packet of mail he saw on it the imprint of the home office of the company in New York.

"What a crash it would bring to me if that good old house failed!" whizzed through his head with such force as to give him a sudden start.

Yes, what would happen if that reaper house failed?

"Never get another job like this," he muttered, almost turning white for the second. "I'd be answering 'boy wanted' ads in the papers!"

But Ted was not one to remain long jolted over imaginary ills.

Slipping the point of his knife under the flap of the envelope, he opened it.

Just as he did so, he glanced up.

"Gracious!"

Through the glass of the window he stared, at a trim little figure out there on the sidewalk.

It all seemed so much like a dream that he instinctively rubbed his eyes.

"Nellie Gray!" he almost exploded.

He gazed at the girl as if fascinated.

"No, no; it can't be!" he murmured.

The young woman, stunningly dressed, was walking slowly toward the hotel entrance.

"She mustn't see me!" gasped Ted, for now he was sure that it really was the sweet girl he remembered so well, and who had been so "nice" to him.

Horrors! She was coming straight toward the entrance of the hotel.

Certainly she was about to enter.

Ted Trim's blood began to run cold. He felt frozen.

"She mustn't see me!" he quivered.

He dropped two letters on the floor, then bent over to pick them up just as the girl entered the office.

By this maneuver he was able to remain bending, with his back turned.

He heard the click of her little heels as the girl walked toward the office desk.

"Good afternoon, Miss Gray," was the clerk's greeting. "Want your key?"

"Yes, if you please."

That voice! Ted would have remembered its sweetness had he been ten thousand miles from home.

It was Nellie—his Nellie, as he told himself hurriedly, and then laughed at his own foolishness.

"Is Mr. Trim in?" Nellie asked the clerk.

"Why, yes; there he is, sitting over there by the— By Jove, he was there a moment ago!"

But Ted was not there now. Like a panic-stricken deer he had sped out into the street.

Nor did he stop until he had gained the next corner.

"Gracious! But that was a narrow escape!" he quivered. "Nellie there in the same hotel with me? How long have we been living under the same roof?"

His eyes filled with tears of recollection.

"What wouldn't I give just to go back and speak to her?" he groaned.

But he dared not.

Back in that other state the police still "wanted" him for two crimes of which he was guiltless of any share.

Mr. Gray believed him guilty, even if Nellie did not.

Mrs. Simpson, too, had added to the reward offered for his capture.

To speak to Nellie Gray could do no good. She could not even know him against her father's wish.

To reveal himself now meant the downfall of all the castle of good luck that he had built up, and which meant life to him.

"I've been kicked off the earth once," he muttered. "I never could stand it again."

Walking on, miserably, he turned in at the first ice cream shop that he came across.

There was a "parlor" in back, with tables, at one of which he could sit down and think.

He ordered an ice cream, but paid no heed to it when it came.

Instead, he sat looking out of a window into an empty back yard.

"Guess I'd better look over my mail. That may clear my head up," he thought, turning once more to the packet of letters.

The opened letter with the company's mark on it was uppermost.

Like one in a dream he took out the enclosed letter, unfolded it and tried to read.

At first he took in not a word on the typewritten sheet. Then, suddenly, his eye lighted on a name.

"Whew!"

Gasping, Ted Trim read the letter through from beginning to end.

"Oh, dear!" he choked, and almost sobbed.

For in the letter was this paragraph:

"Our vice-president, Mr. Zenas Gray, who is absent on a Western trip, will make it a point to stop over at Barber for the purpose of conferring with you as to your recent

excellent work with our goods. Mr. Gray will stop at the New Empire Hotel. You will, of course, make it a point to see Mr. Gray and to attend to any directions that he may give you."

"Nellie's father the vice-president of the company that I've done so well with!" throbbed Ted. "Make it a point to meet him? Well, I rather guess—nit!"

He sat there trembling. Well enough Ted knew what it would mean to refuse to meet the vice-president of his company.

Yet to follow orders and meet Mr. Gray would be just as bad.

"He'd know me in a second," groaned poor Ted. "I couldn't deny being that same boy. Then he'd send for the police. Or, anyway, he'd bounce me as the company's man in Missouri!"

For some moments the boy sat staring dully around him.

Fortunately, he had the little "parlor" to himself.

"Down comes the whole glorious castle!" he faltered. "The job gone. About as good as kicked off the earth again!"

For just a second or two the wild idea came into his head of seeing Nellie Gray and begging her to intercede with her father.

"But she wouldn't do it," he quivered. "What interest can she take in a boy tramp, even if he is dressed a little better than a tramp now? She might stand the tramp well enough, but not a boy whom everybody believes to be a criminal."

He shook his head, having made up his mind that it would be worse than foolish to even think of seeing the girl.

To occupy his mind, he cut open another envelope that had the hotel's stamp on it.

Inside was nothing but a card, yet the sight of it gave Ted another chill of misery.

On the card was printed the name of Zenas Gray.

On the other side was a message which ran:

"Dear Mr. Trim: I am waiting to see you. Send your card to my room at 5 p. m. Z. G."

"Send my card to his room, eh? I guess not! But what shall I do? Have I got to give up this splendid job—toss over this grand start in life? And all because of things that I never did!"

Again the impulse to go to Nellie Gray surged up strongly within him.

Then came another urging, the strongest one he could have—that of his pride.

"What on earth have I been thinking of?" he asked himself, contemptuously. "Hiding behind a woman's skirts? Even if the young woman were willing? Bosh! I'd sooner be cash boy in a dry-goods store!"

Slowly, as he thought, one hand traveled to an inner pocket. He produced note-book and pencil.

Then he looked down at the dog, that had its nose resting curiously on his knee.

"Oh, I wish you could talk, Gyp!" burst, impulsively,

from the boy. "If you could, I know you'd give me the very advice that I need at this time. But you can't talk—more's the pity!"

As if he were trying, Gyp wagged his tail slowly, doubtfully, and looked whiningly up into his master's face.

"Crash! Here goes everything!" shivered Ted Trim, as his pencil began to move over the paper.

Yet two or three pages he tore up into small bits, and not for some minutes did he succeed in writing just what he wanted to write.

"Come on, now, old fellow, and we'll get this over while I'm still sane," muttered Ted, rising hastily from the table.

Outside, he stopped at the cashier's desk long enough to pay for the cream that he had not tasted.

Then he started to go through the door to the street.

Started, that is—but he fell quickly back, staring as if he had seen a ghost.

A queer enough looking ghost it was—a brassy-looking, mean-eyed youth in a flashy looking suit.

"Fluke Griggs!" quivered Ted Trim, inwardly. "Now the ruin's complete!"

CHAPTER IX.

RIP!

"Hullo, Ted Trim. Oh, ain't you swell these days?"

Fluke Griggs, with his chin thrust out in an ugly leer, and his hands tucked into his pockets, had stopped dead short.

For one wild instant Ted was tempted to draw himself up coldly and deny his name.

But in the next instant he knew the folly of doing that.

Fluke Griggs was not likely to be humbugged.

For too many years had Fluke tormented this former slave, to be mistaken about him now.

"Say, can't you talk to a feller?" demanded Fluke, in an injured voice.

"Howdy, Fluke," compromised Ted, faintly.

"And is that the best ye can do?" insisted the principal heir of 'Riah Griggs. "Say, Ted, ye never was much on manners. Why, I'm tickled to death to meet you, and I ain't above saying so."

"What are you doing out here in this part of the world?" Ted demanded.

"Now, ye're shouting," replied the other, with approval. "What am I doing? Say, Ted, I cut the old bunch out, just like you did."

"You've left home?"

"Had to, 'cause home wouldn't leave me," declared Fluke, confidently.

"You ran away?"

"Sure thing! Ted, I don't blame ye for not being able to stand that bunch. It's too slow—and too much

work. I'm out to see the world, I am, and have a good time. But whatcher been doing, Ted? Playing the races? My, but you look almost like a gentleman!"

That was much more than could have been said for Fluke, except by a big stretching of the imagination.

The Griggs boy was in a checked suit, so loud that it ought to have been "heard a good ways off."

It was of cheap, shoddy material.

On his head the boy wore a wide-brimmed, soft hat of the cheapest kind.

The whole make-up suggested that the boy had tried to make up as a "sport," and that he didn't know how.

"Going to ask me to have a beer?" hinted Fluke.

"A beer?" repeated the bewildered Ted. "Good heavens, Fluke, you haven't learned to drink, have you?"

"Oh, once in a while, just to keep my stomach in shape," Fluke confided. "Going to treat?"

"Say," suggested Ted, who was anxious to get rid of this youth in some way, "come inside and have an ice cream with me."

"All right," nodded Fluke indifferently, and slouched into the "parlor" in the wake of our hero.

Ted ordered in dull despair.

"Now, tell me what ye're doing," Fluke commanded, with much of his old-time bossiness. "It's good, anyway, for I never saw ye rigged out so swell before."

"What are you doing?" Ted cross-questioned.

"One question at a time," retorted Fluke, sulkily. "You tell me first."

"Me? Oh, I've been traveling with a patent medicine fakir," lied Ted, desperately. "I'm just out of a job, and have got to find something else to do."

"It ain't bothering ye any, anyway, I reckon," grinned Fluke. "I saw ye at the New Empire Hotel this morning, and that's a pretty swell place to stay. Couldn't do it without ye had a bunch of money."

Fluke grinned wickedly as he saw Ted, despite himself, swiftly change color.

"Pop'd be mighty glad to see ye here," grinned the other boy. "He never got over yer running off with that three hundred in cold cash."

"You know well enough that I never ran away with it," Ted retorted, eyeing Fluke, indignantly.

"Oh, maybe ye didn't," admitted the other youngster.

"Fluke Griggs, you stole that money from your father! You did it yourself!"

"Ye needn't talk so loud about it," rejoined young Griggs, uneasily.

"No, I suppose not," Ted retorted, bitterly. "You're afraid some policeman would overhear and take you up on general suspicion until he had time to write to your home."

"That cop'd get two of us, wouldn't he?" asked Fluke, in a leering whisper.

Ted paled again.

"Stopping at the New Empire with friends?" demanded the Griggs boy, suddenly.

Ted started again, as he thought of the Grays, and Fluke, seeing, laughed again in evil glee.

"Oh, I guess ye won't be sending any word home about me," announced Fluke, confidently. "If ye did, I'd manage, somehow, to get word to the hotel folks about you. And the police'd know that ye're wanted, too. Say, honest, now, Ted, ye haven't any idea that ye're going to give me away, have you?"

"No," Ted admitted, honestly.

He had no particular reason, anyway, for going out of his way to help 'Riah Griggs to find his son.

"That's all right then," declared Fluke, with satisfaction. "But remember! As long as I keep out of trouble, I keep my mouth shut about you. If anything happens to me, then I squeal about you. That's fair, ain't it?"

Ted flared into the mean, shifting eyes of Fluke.

"You dirty little beast!" burst from Trim's lips.

"Oh, it's war, then, is it?" demanded Fluke, rising to his feet. "All right, then! I may get in a hole, but you'll be buried under a mountain when I get through with you."

"Sit down, Fluke," commanded our hero. "It isn't war, or anything like it. As long as you keep your mouth shut I'm going to do the same. I hate to take your low kind of tactics, but you force me to do it."

"Oh, all right, then," nodded the Griggs boy. "You say you mean to play fair, and that's always the way I do. Well, what now?"

"I've got to be going," responded Ted, rising.

"Where to?"

"That's my business."

"Oh, all right then, Ted Trim. I didn't know but maybe you and me could kinder bunk out as partners for a while."

In order not to make a needless enemy, Ted gulped down the disgust that this proposition gave him.

"I guess I'll see you later, all right, Fluke," and Trim passed quickly out into the street.

But Fluke, with the cunning of his kind, dogged our hero.

It gave Fluke enough of a gasp, too.

For Ted Trim hurried through side streets to the telegraph office.

"Now, what in blazes is he telegraphing about?" pondered Fluke, shaking inwardly. "Is that sneak squealing on me? Oh, if he is, won't he be sorry, though? I reckon I'd better take care of him pretty quick, so's to be sure of him."

Had Fluke read the telegram that our hero was sending he would have been wiser.

For Ted's telegram was addressed to the New York office of the company that employed him.

And that message ran:

"Sudden illness compels me to resign immediately. Unable to wait to see your vice-president. Never mind money due me for commissions on sales. EDWARD TRIM.

Full of his own evil-minded suspicions, and planning

what he would do—and how to do it quick!—Fluke Griggs slouched away so that Ted did not encounter that worthless young wretch as he came out of the telegraph office.

There was a cab close by. Ted, though he felt strongly tempted to fly from the town by the next train, found himself yet unable to do it.

He must have just one more glimpse, anyway, of sweet Nellie Gray.

"Though I'd die sooner'n have her see me and know me!" he quivered.

"Driver," said Trim, coolly, as he approached the cab, "just drive back and forth through the principal streets a while, will you? I've got a little business on hand that I want to think over. I can always think better when I'm riding slowly. You needn't bother about asking directions until I give you some. Take this, and you'll have more coming later."

Into the driver's hand he slipped a two-dollar bill.

Then he entered the cab, pulling down the curtains.

As he had expected, Trim found that the old curtains had a few holes in them. He could see out into the streets without being seen.

"Get up on the front seat, dear old Gyp," ordered the boy, and then sat looking out into the streets through which the cab rolled.

For half an hour our hero saw nothing that interested him.

Then, suddenly, he gave a great, quivering start.

For Fluke Griggs, slouching along, had been accosted by three men whom Ted Trim knew without a shadow of a doubt.

They were the same three who had robbed Zenas Gray's country house!

"Now, kid, we's got you," announced the leader of the trio to Fluke. "Don't you try to give us the slip again. You're ours! Savvy?"

Startled Ted Trim was listening with all his ears.

CHAPTER X.

SLAM!

The cab had stopped for a moment, behind a big truck in a crush of vehicles on that busy street.

"I'm afraid to have anything to do with you folks!" Fluke chattered.

"You'll be more afraid not to stick to us!" warned the leader. "Kid, we know all about you—how you skipped west with two thousand dollars that you stole from your father, Uriah Griggs, of Stony Brook."

"Gracious!" Ted quivered, silently.

"It's a lie!" panted Fluke.

"Is it, kid? Well, you know best about that. But if you try to give us the slip again, then just wait for what'll happen! Now, do you stick to us, and put up the money

that we want? Do you help us in the business and take a share in the profits of the game?"

"Y-y-yes!" stammered frightened Luke.

The cab was rolling forward again, leaving the low-voiced, evil quartette to the rear.

"Oh, poor Fluke!" thought Ted, with tears in his eyes now. "Poor, miserable little beast!"

Then, an instant later, Ted wondered:

"Fluke never proved himself my friend. But I wonder if I can't do something to keep the poor little beast from being a crook?"

Trim peered out of the tiny rear window of the cab.

There was Fluke, walking down the street in the opposite direction with his new masters—his masters because they knew his guilty secret.

"That's what a fellow gets for starting crooked," muttered Ted, next adding, to himself, with a queer smile:

"And I seem to be in almost as bad a fix without having done anything wrong!"

He gave the check strap a pull, which brought the cab to a stop and the driver to the door.

"Driver," queried our hero, "when you stopped just back there, did you notice three men talking to a boy at the curb? They're back there now."

"They've just turned the corner, then, I guess," nodded the driver, looking down the street.

"Follow them. See just where they go, and don't give 'em any reason to suppose that you're following. Understand?"

The driver nodded, grinning slyly.

"Get around the corner quick, then, and keep 'em in sight after you once lay eyes on 'em!"

So the cab turned, and Ted Trim, who had reason enough to keep his mind on his own troubled affairs, started off to see what he could do to help out one who had never been good to him.

There was not much to be done, apparently, for, when the cab got around the corner Fluke and his bad company were lost to sight.

The driver kept on at a trot until he had gone two blocks down the side street, yet without catching sight of the evil four.

"Orders?" demanded the driver, again presenting himself at the open door of the cab.

"I guess there's nothing to do but to go on with our old programme of driving slowly anywhere," Ted sighed. Back on to the main street of the town rolled the cab.

And now, as our hero looked out upon the street from his concealment, he had a treat for which he had longed.

Another sight of Nellie Gray!

Here she was, in a most fetching costume, sitting beside her father on the rear seat of a handsome gray automobile.

The regulation chauffeur, goggles and all, was upon the front seat, but him Ted favored with hardly a glance.

The auto was running so slowly that it took some seconds to pass Ted's cab.

How that youngster feasted his hungry eyes on the girl!

She was chatting with her father, her face brilliant and laughing.

Even over the steady chugging of the great car our hero heard her laughing voice, and then she was gone.

"Had I ought to brave everything to go to Mr. Gray and tell him that the men who robbed his safe are in town?" quivered Ted.

He battled with himself.

His desire to see the Grays again, to speak with them, was almost as strong as his fear of the consequences.

"But what good would it do to tell Mr. Gray about the burglars?" he wondered, and shook his head. "Those burglars haven't any of the plunder left, or they wouldn't be trying to get poor Fluke to stake them with cash. No, no! It can't do any good to go to Mr. Gray. And no use, I'm afraid, to try to help Fluke."

The longer he rode the more his head seemed to get in a whirl.

They were passing a small, mean-looking hotel now.

Tug went the check strap.

"Stop here?" asked the driver, bending down from his box in some surprise.

Ted, nodding, stepped out to the sidewalk. He handed up another greenback to the driver, then started into the dingy little office of the mean hotel.

This would do as well as any place to hide in.

Registering under an assumed name, he went up to his room, followed by wondering Gyp.

"Doggie, old fellow, this is the queerest kind of a whirl," Trim confided to the yellow one. "My splendid job is gone, and we've got to come down to any old kind of boy's work. And I can't go near the Grays, or I'm likely to find myself in prison. I can't even tell Mr. Gray that his burglars are here in town, and it wouldn't do any good if I could, for they sure haven't got a dollar left of what they stole from him. And I can't very well save Fluke. That ain't so much matter, though. Yes, it is, too, though. I'd hate to see my worst enemy going for sure-enough the way most folks think I went."

Too upset to care about eating, Ted undressed and got into bed early.

He was up early, too—altogether too early, but hunger had stopped his slumber soon after daylight.

In need of food, Ted hurried down into the office. The dining room was not yet open, so he and Gyp passed out into the street.

"I may as well buy enough grub for the day," muttered Ted. "Then I won't have to show my nose out again."

With a bulky package of food under one arm he started back to the little hotel.

On the way he met a newsboy, and bought a copy of the Barber "Banner."

Up in his room again, he first of all attended to the appetite of Gyp.

Then, laying out some food for himself, our hero opened his paper.

He read slowly, and without much interest until he turned to one of the inside pages.

Here, in one of the columns, his own name, in large type, caught his eye.

It was an advertisement, which read:

"Edward Trim! Please see me at my hotel without delay. Highly important. Z. G."

"It must be important, if he's advertising for me," smiled the boy. "But I don't believe that will catch me."

He heard a heavy tread in the next room, and then the sound of a voice—that of the leader of the burglars!

In an instant Ted was alert.

Crossing the room on tiptoe, he came to where a ray of light came in through a crack in the out-of-order wall.

It was through this crack that the sound had come.

Two of the gang were in there. He could make out their faces distinctly.

"Remember that old country place, in the east, of a man named Gray?"

"Where we did the summer job?" nodded the leader's companion.

"Yes; well, old Gray is in town."

"It wouldn't do him any good to catch us now."

"It isn't of that I'm thinking," replied the leader, slowly. "But the old man has his daughter with him."

"Is she worth stealing?" laughed the other burglar, softly.

"Is she, man!" retorted the leader.

"Is that running in your head, Fallon?" demanded the other.

"Johnson, I'd steal that girl and run off with her in a second, if I knew how to," retorted the leader, who had answered to the name of Fallon.

"She must be a beauty, then, old man, to turn your cool head in that way."

"Why, man, she is a beauty. And one of those proud, high steppers. If I could run off with her, marry her, and keep her a while, she'd be too proud to ever want to return to her folks. Then, if I could play it on her right, we could keep her and make her of the greatest use to our little crew!"

The men were talking so softly that, had it not been for the crack in the wall, their voices would not have gone beyond their own room.

"Are you in earnest?" asked the fellow addressed as Johnson.

"If I can see any way of working it, I am," cried Fallon. "I'd risk hanging to get that girl!"

"Perhaps it can be worked," suggested Johnson, thoughtfully. "Some of the money you're going to make that kid give up might put the job through."

"Will you be with me, Johnson?"

"Sure enough, if we can work it properly. But, just now, I'm going to have a sleep. That's what I came here for."

"Right enough," nodded Fallon. "And sleep for me, too. We'll talk the girl business over when we wake up."

"Then you'll talk it over in a safe place!" blazed listening Ted.

Nellie Gray threatened even with the shadow of a danger? Then Ted Trim would go even through death itself to save her.

"Tread softly, Gyp, old fellow," he barely whispered, holding up a finger to warn the dog.

He let himself out of the room.

Once down the corridor, and on the stairs, Ted walked briskly.

He was no longer thinking of himself—no longer cared who might recognize him.

He hurried from the hotel and into the nearest telephone pay station.

Stepping into a closet and ringing up, the quivering boy demanded:

"Connect me with the chief of police."

After a minute or so he had that official on the wire.

"I've got something important to tell you," began Ted. "Are you listening?"

"Listening all right," came the voice of the chief.

"Down in Sluggs' Hotel, room 43, are two crooks, old hands at burglary. They go by the names of Fallon and Johnson. There's a third member of the crew, and he may be in some other room. They're taking a nap. Early last summer they robbed the house of a Mr. Zenas Gray, who is now at the New Empire Hotel. They're even wondering if they can't abduct Miss Gray; and they're planning some local burglary. They——"

"Who are you?" broke in the chief's voice.

Ignoring the question, Ted went on.

"If you get these men, you'll probably recognize them as men whose pictures are in the Rogues' Gallery. At all events, I know them to be old crooks."

"Who are you?" repeated the chief, sharply.

"Now, surely, chief, you realize that sometimes parties give police tips who don't want to be known themselves. But you can't make any mistake about going to the Sluggs Hotel and looking up these men. Good——"

"Who——"

"Good-bye!"

Ting-a-ling! Ted hung up his receiver, hastened outside, paid his charge, and got quickly on the street.

There was a small, close, stuffy, badly lighted bookseller's store across the street from Sluggs' Hotel.

Into this store Ted coolly walked, pretended to be interested in the books on the shelves, and waited.

From where he stood he could look out of the window.

Within five minutes he saw four men in ordinary garb enter the hotel.

"They're wearing police shoes, all right," quivered Ted, glancing over the book that he held.

He waited, feverishly, five, ten minutes. A little more.

"There they are!" he cried, suddenly, his eyes flashing.

"Great blazes! They're caught all right!"

For two of the plain-clothes policemen were coming out

of the hotel, escorting Fallon and Johnson, securely handcuffed.

But others were coming behind. Two more officers brought up the rear—with the third burglar and young Griggs, also handcuffed.

Fluke was sniveling wetly. He looked scared to death, and his short little legs seemed not strong enough to hold him up.

"Why, great snakes! Those rascals had Fluke in another room, and now he's pinched!" gasped Ted. "Nice thing for me to do, when I had hoped to keep Fluke out of a scrape! But what do I care about him, any way, when Miss Nellie is in question?"

It was certain enough that the Fallon gang were in the toils to stay there. The four vigilant policemen looked proud of their capture.

A crowd gathered and followed the police party down the street.

"By hokey!" flashed suddenly through Trim's head. "Now, I am in queer luck! Fluke will be sure I brought this about. He'll squeal on me for revenge, and won't make such a wide shot, either. Ted Trim, my boy, did you ever hear of that mystic number—twenty-three?"

Waiting only until the police crowd had gotten some way down the street, Ted stepped out on to the sidewalk and hurried in the opposite direction, which happened to lead to the railway station.

"Me for the simple life—somewhere!" muttered the boy in grim alarm.

For, well enough he knew, Fluke, as soon as he recovered from his first fright, would tell about Ted Trim.

"I can't hide long in this small city," quivered the boy. "Best not to try at all."

Down the street he headed, at a good, swinging stride.

But there was more excitement afloat.

"Look out!" shrieked someone.

"It's running wild!" yelled another.

There were other cries, some of warning and some of terror.

People on the sidewalk plunged for doorways—anywhere out of harm's path.

For, from down the street, an automobile was approaching at a mad speed.

Over the wheel, limply hung the chauffeur, as if he had fainted.

Even as Ted Trim took his first startled look the chauffeur slid off the seat into the bottom of the car.

It was a handsome, gray-colored automobile.

In the back, terrified and helpless, stood the only passenger, a terrified girl.

"Nellie Gray!" gasped Ted, and thought the world had come to an end.

At the curb stood a horse hitched to a light delivery wagon.

Into the wagon bounded Ted. Up like a flash, he snatched the reins and lashed them down over the startled horse's back.

Away plunged the brute, and Ted steered—steered the horse at a gallop straight toward the speeding automobile.

"You're crazy!" shouted a man from an upper window, as Ted's stolen horse dashed by. "Steer out of danger!"

"Danger be——" flashed back over Ted's shoulder.

The auto, still keeping to the middle of the road, was bearing down on him at almost express speed.

CHAPTER XI.

BANG!

There was just one second of life left!

Ted, standing on the seat of the wagon, his hands gripping the lines firmly, was calculating with the eye of a sharpshooter.

The slightest veer, however, on the part of the automobile, would spoil his one calculation.

Fortunately, the galloping horse was accustomed to autos—was not afraid.

Swing! Ted, making his last pull on the reins, dropped them.

Auto and wagon were still fifty feet apart when Ted Trim sprang.

With all the power in his muscles he jumped slantingly across the path of the auto.

Down he came, and then happened the thing for which he had hardly dared hope.

He landed, owing to the great speed of the car, on the front seat—standing.

Standing? It was swaying, instead, that fearful, dizzy motion.

He started to pitch backward upon Nellie Gray.

But that young woman, cool as she was sweet, stretched out her arms and steadied him.

For just a second only.

Then, catching full control of his momentarily limp body, Ted slid down into the front compartment, all but landing on the unconscious chauffeur.

But to that individual Ted paid not a second's heed.

Our hero's hand was on the steering gear.

He had the car under control!

Next one hand sought the lever.

Gracefully in to the curb ran the great car.

Jolt! It stopped rather suddenly.

Turning like a flash, Ted Trim leaped over into the rear compartment.

With Nellie Gray in his arms, he darted to the sidewalk, just as the scores of witnesses of this splendid rescue dashed up.

"Take her!" he quivered, passing Nellie, now reeling and almost fainting, into the arms of the first woman to approach.

Then, ere there was any time to pay attention to him, he slipped onward and around the nearest corner.

"The railway for me now!" he quivered. "But, oh, I thank heaven I was able to do that much for Nellie!"

Breaking into a run, he streaked it to the next corner, and darted around.

Plump! He had collided violently with a man past middle age.

"I beg your——" began Ted, impulsively. "Oh—thunderation!"

"Great gosh!" uttered the man, starting back.

"'Riah Griggs!"

"Ted Trim!"

Surely the last man on earth our hero cared to meet just then!

Leap! 'Riah had pounced upon the boy, catching him eagerly, vengefully, with both hands.

"Oh, ye little varmint! I've got ye now!"

Exerting all his strength, 'Riah shook the captured boy as if he hoped to kill him by that means.

"Steal my money, will ye?"

Shake! shake!

"I didn't!"

"Lying little thief!"

Shake! shake!

"Come along with me!" roared 'Riah Griggs, triumphantly. "I'll drag ye to the nearest jail!"

"Shut up, and listen a minute, won't you?" glared Ted.

He was thankful that, on this small side street, no crowd was gathering.

"What'll I listen to?" 'Riah demanded. "Going to tell me where my money is?"

"I can tell you where your son is."

"Fluke?"

"Yes, Fluke."

"Tell me, then," glared 'Riah. "I'm after him, too! Oh, I'll send that ungrateful boy to jail!"

"I won't tell you where he is, then!" quivered Ted. "If you, his own father, won't stand by him when he's in trouble, I'd be hanged before I'd help you!"

"Oh, he's somewhere in this part of the country," asserted 'Riah. "I know that, for the police tracked him that far. I'll find Luke all right. Don't ye worry! And I've got you! Come along to limbo with you!"

If 'Riah figured that he had our hero, that was where he made one of the greatest mistakes of his life.

True, both his hands gripped Ted Trim's collar just as a pair of steel vises might have done.

But rough knocking about the world had taught our hero the value of that most dazing of all blows—a good, hard punch landed full in the stomach.

Whump! 'Riah got that blow—got it at its fullest and best.

He went down, letting go his double hold.

'Riah Griggs was so busy, in fact, that he hadn't even time to cry out.

Before 'Riah felt any good again, Ted Trim was around two more corners.

"For the depot, sure, this time," whizzed Ted.

Then, as suddenly, he halted.

"Great Scott! I can't afford to take the risk of hanging around there until a train comes!" he gasped, and slipped into a doorway.

In that shelter he pulled out his time-table.

"Lucky thought to look it up," he muttered. "No train for an hour and a half. It's only two minutes from here, so I'll hide, and wait until folks who may be looking for me there think I've gone somewhere else."

Next door was a bakeshop.

Ted entered boldly, stepping right through to the bakery in the rear.

"Good-morning," he said, with the cheek that he had picked up on the road.

"Yah! Goot-morning," answered the baker, eyeing him.

"I'm traveling for the Great American Yeast Company," lied Ted, glibly. "How much do you pay a year for your yeast?"

"A hunderd dollar, maybe," replied the baker. "But I don't want no new yeast."

"I haven't asked you to buy any," Ted went on, as glibly as ever. "Tell you what I do want. I just want to sit here and watch you work for an hour or so. When I've seen the way you do your work I'll make you an offer that will save nearly half your work. And our company will furnish you with fifty dollars' worth of yeast, to be ordered as you want it, and not a cent to pay. Couldn't make a fairer offer than that, could I?"

"Iss it bunco?" asked the German, suspiciously.

"If you think so, forget it. Now, heave ahead and get that dough into the pans. Then to talk business with you."

Ted pretended to watch the baker, but watched his own timepiece much more closely.

"Time's up," quivered Ted to himself, as he put away his watch, finally. Then aloud:

"My friend, I'm going out for cigars, and then I'll come back to run this business over with you."

He was in a quiver inside, though, wondering whether 'Riah Griggs or Fluke had already set the police on his track.

Toot! toot!

Glancing down the street, he saw a big black touring car coming on at whizzing speed.

"Why do they always travel so fast?" he wondered.

Then he reached the corner, and had more excitement to think about.

"Stop thief!"

Coming down the cross street, headed for this very corner, was a frantic mob.

Two policemen, two dozen grown-up men, two score of boys—all in mad chase of one panting fugitive.

And that fugitive was Fluke!

"Great blazes! He'll run blind into the auto!"

As the startled cry escaped him, Ted Trim sprang forward.

For Luke Griggs, as yet not able to see the rushing car

on the other crossing street, was almost at the corner of death.

"Here, Fluke! Run this way! Look out for the auto!"

Young Griggs turned just enough to see the boy he regarded as his worst enemy.

A panting jeer came to Fluke's lips as he darted on faster than ever.

He was at the corner—too late to realize his fearful danger.

And Ted Trim was close, indeed, to him.

It looked as if both youngsters must go down under the flying wheels!

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

Grip!

Ted had just time to reach the spot, reach out his hand and brace himself.

He had a good, tight hold of young Griggs' coat.

Wrench! Maddened by hate and fear, Fluke tore himself free of that saving clutch.

Blind to the auto, the driver of which had seen the danger too late, Luke Griggs pitched forward fairly before the speeding machine.

Bump! The car caught the miserable boy fairly.

Then, as the auto speeded on, the scared driver letting out speed more than ever, the boy's body came down into the road.

"The boy's been killed!" announced a voice.

Close to Ted's face glared the blazing, reddened eyes of 'Riah Griggs.

He pounced upon Ted, shouting hoarsely:

"Officers, arrest this boy! He's wanted! He pushed my boy to his death, too!"

"Say, you bloated old lobster, shut up!" roared a policeman, turning angrily on 'Riah. "He blamed near lost his own life trying to save that other youngster! I saw it!"

"Arrest him, anyway!" stormed 'Riah. "He stole money from me, and he's wanted for two burglaries besides. Arrest him, I say, or you'll find you've made a big mistake!"

Choking, gulping, 'Riah Griggs staggered over to the spot where the bystanders had laid his son.

"Dead!" gasped the old man, in horror.

"Dead," answered one of the bystanders. "Poor lad! He never knew what hit him."

"I s'pose we'll have to hold you," spoke one of the policemen, regretfully, as he laid a hand on Ted's shoulder. "The old man makes a felony charge against you, and we can't let you go until the thing has been looked into."

"Keep me, then," Ted answered, dully.

Toot! Another auto was approaching. Ted, sick of the

machines for this day, did not even look around until he heard a voice cry:

"Why, that's Ted!"

The sweet voice thrilled him, then made him flush red with shame.

'Riah, his first burst of grief over, turned and looked.

"Officers," he said, hoarsely, as he pointed toward the auto. "That man in the auto knows all about one of the burglary charges against Ted Trim."

"Come over and let this man have a look at you, then, youngster," commanded Ted's especial captor, turning and giving him a push forward.

Forced thus to the meeting, our hero turned, his head now high up in the air, his eyes looking fearlessly at last into the kindling eyes of Nellie Gray.

"Do you identify this boy, sir?" asked the policeman.

"I do," nodded Zenas Gray, who sat beside his uneasy daughter on the rear seat of the car.

"Is he wanted for a burglary?" insisted the cop.

"He was charged with helping rob my safe," answered Zenas Gray.

"But you don't believe a word of it, papa—you know you don't!" cried Nellie.

"Officers," spoke Zenas Gray, an instant later, "I was one of the complainants against this young man. I know now that the charge was absurd. There never was any warrant issued against he boy, and there's nothing for you to hold him on. The offense was alleged to have been committed in another State, anyway, and there are no papers over there that you could hold him on, anyway."

"But this man has made a charge," suggested the policeman, indicating 'Riah.

"Then he withdraws it," declared Mr. Gray. "Don't you, Griggs?"

"Why, if it will oblige any, I might," assented 'Riah, always eager to stand well with the rich.

"Look the other way!" cried Ted, suddenly, veering Nellie around.

A wagon had just driven up for all that was left of Fluke.

Bang! The tailboard closed in place, the wagon rattled away again.

"Officer," went on Mr. Gray, calmly, "here is my card. I'm at the New Empire Hotel. If you want this young man again you'll find him there with me. Is that satisfactory?"

"It would be, if the chief said so," replied one of the policemen.

"Then telephone your chief at once, won't you? Tell him there are no arrest papers anywhere to hold this boy on, and no one to make a complaint against him. Tell him, also, that the young man can be found at my rooms in the hotel if the chief changes his mind."

One of the policemen disappeared into the corner drug store.

After a few moments he came out, grinning in a satisfied way.

"The chief wants to know," he announced, "what I'd mean anyway, by arresting a fellow when there's no papers out for him and no one to make a complaint."

"Then Mr. Trim is at liberty?" insisted Mr. Gray.

"Why, if the plucky chap waits for me to arrest him, he'll be standing here next week."

"Good enough—and thank you heartily, officer," responded Mr. Gray. "Now, then, Mr. Edward Trim, climb in here beside me. You can sit beside the young lady, too, if you'll behave yourself. Chauffeur, to the hotel!"

Yap! yap!

"Hold on, please!" blurted Ted. "Can't faithful old Gyp get in here?"

"Sooner than lose your company," smiled Mr. Gray.

So Gyp had his first ride in a chug-wagon then and there.

"I'm not going to try, just now, Trim, to thank you for your splendid act this morning," went on Mr. Gray, smiling, but choking slightly. "I've got to think it all out and choose my words at a later hour. And so you're our hustling young salesman out in this part of the world? I never dropped, until Nellie suggested that you might be. And she never thought of it until after we'd reached the hotel here. But why did you try to get away from us? And why on earth did you telegraph your resignation—which the company simply won't accept?"

"Do you suppose I wanted to see you," cried Ted, "when I thought you'd accuse me of being a burglar's accomplice?"

"Well, maybe not," nodded Mr. Gray, thoughtfully. "But that's all forgotten, anyway, Trim, since we don't believe it any longer."

Nellie didn't speak; but her eyes were swimming as she smiled up at him—and, somehow, these young people had gotten hold of each other's nearer hand.

The luncheon, that afternoon, that was served in the Gray suite at the hotel, was the jolliest meal at which our hero had ever been seated.

As they ate, Mr. Gray explained why he had wanted to meet our hero here in Barber.

The company had concluded that a hustling salesman like Ted was entitled to better territory in which to sell the reapers.

More than that, the company wanted Ted, as soon as the present rush season was over, to go on to the home offices and plan a new selling season with the company's advertising agent.

"I may as well add," said Mr. Gray, earnestly, "that the company rather expects that you'll turn out to be about our best man."

In the afternoon 'Riah Griggs showed up. He had gotten over his grief enough to think about business.

"I'm entitled to what this boy earns," 'Riah explained, greedily, to astounded Mr. Gray. "I'll take charge of his savings, and his earnings can be sent to me after this, until he's twenty-one."

"You have regular adoption papers?" demanded Mr. Gray.

"No," 'Riah admitted, grudgingly. "But the state put him in my charge until he was twenty-one."

"That counts for nothing," smiled Mr. Gray, coolly. "The state doesn't put boys out until they're twenty-one, but simply until the state calls them in again. This boy needs a guardian, and, being more than fourteen years old, he can choose his own guardian. Perhaps he'll choose me. Good-day, Mr. Griggs!"

'Riah blustered, but went when he was positively ordered out.

And he never again got the boy whom he had ordered off the earth.

Nor did 'Riah recover any of the money that Fluke had stolen from him. Whatever was left, young Griggs had hidden somewhere, and it never was found.

Fallon and his gang, being wanted in Missouri, were never sent East, but are now serving time in Missouri.

Zenas Gray very quickly convinced Mrs. Simpson that Ted had not been guilty in the robbery at her house. That good woman was greatly delighted at being convinced, and is now one of our hero's warmest friends.

Ted was twenty-one the other day, and a husband—Nellie's.

He was also made second vice-president of the reaper company, and is now so securely entrenched in business that he feels certain that no one can kick him off the earth—least of all, 'Riah, who is sourer than ever.

Tough luck isn't always incurable! Ted's wasn't.

THE END.

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